

Novel Illustrations







This text is a machine translation (MTL).

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Prologue: Treasure at the Undersea Temple

Beneath the moonlight, the shadow of an airship reflected over the calm surface of the sea. Yet even should one look up, there was no airship to be seen in the night's sky. The sole proof of its presence was that shadow, which remained mirrored on the sea's surface.

In fact, the unusual ship would be impossible to detect approaching under any normal circumstance, invisible to both radars and to the naked eye as it was. Radio waves would be absorbed by its hull composed of rare materials while the nano display tech deployed on its exterior allowed the hull to instantly blend into the surrounding landscape.

Its name, the Vimana, the Active Stealth technology wielding Mega Machine ship, said stealth technology being of the most advanced known to man.

And just below the stationary Vimana lay an archeological monument located deep beneath the sea, hundreds of meters below and off the coast of the Caribbean's Cape San Antonio. This was the airship's current target.

<Attack Device "White Rabbit", approaching drop point.>

The bottom hatch of the aircraft opened and a small single person aircraft with a conical segment attached to its nose appeared. Its appearance was similar to that of a small jet but with the wings and afterburner at a proportionally much smaller size.

<Countdown Start: Five, Four, Three, Two, One...>

The instant the composed sounding countdown reached zero, the cutely named Attack Device was dropped from the Vimana and left to enter the sea, diving as it would down the rabbit hole to Wonderland.

Hundreds of meters down and enshrined somewhere within the impenetrable darkness of the depths of the sea rested a gigantic pyramid-like building, comparable to the Great Pyramids of Egypt.

Within the large structure, one of its jet black monolithic inner walls began to suddenly glow white. Around that white point, the stone that made up the wall began to dissolve, allowing the white conical object that drilled the hole to poke through. Amidst absolute silence the cone's tip quietly opened and someone dressed in a black diver suit marked with orange lines slipped out from within. Paying no mind to the darkness, the intruder, who could be identified as a young girl just from a casual glance at her body's silhouette, went straight to work.

"According to the sonar scans taken from up above, the interior is filled with air, so breathing in here should be okay."

Equipped with night vision goggles, the girl spoke aloud the information brought up by the analysis on her wristwatch, in order to leave an audio log.

The interior of the building has been sealed since a time long forgotten. So the possibility of an unknown pathogen, perhaps long extinct in present days, still laying dormant here meant she wasn't quite willing to remove her mask that easily, even if the device said the air was technically breathable. However, the quantity of gas within her cylinder was limited. Probably best to save some extra air in case of an emergency.

The girl switched from the cylinder on her mask to the filtration system and the moment she did, her sense of smell was assaulted by the overwhelming stench of what you'd likely find in a zoo. Listening carefully, she found she could faintly hear the signs of something approaching her from afar too.

"I'm detecting a nearby bogey. Are you picking anything up?"

She asked into her microphone.

<A large number of creatures have begun awakening all of a sudden. It appears to be a trained response to the Professor's scent.>

The receiver in the girl's ear answered back, the voice on it devoid of any interference whatsoever.

"Wait, what-!? Then what was even the point of me sending someone in first

then?"

The girl known as the Professor loudly complained.

<The group sent ahead consisted of Trump Soldiers and March Hare.>

"The Trump Soldiers are one thing, but I don't see how March Hare made it through."

<March Hare and I both lack scents to which they can react to.>

The characteristic stench caused by waste odors that all living things were forced to emit if they were to survive was something that the ones they had sent first, March Hare and the Trump Soldiers, both lacked.

"So my opponents have a smell fetish. Roger that."

The girl scanned her surroundings and delivered a big sigh. One of the previous visitors prior to her own arrival was here. Though, perhaps calling it a current occupant would be more accurate. Physically, it was over a meter tall and it possessed a large head that stood out in disproportionate contrast to its small body.

"Huh, don't think I've ever seen UMAs^[1] like this before."

She switched from infrared to echolocation on her night vision goggles. While the display was monochromatic, she could now appreciate a clear three-dimensional view of the approaching monsters.

Large eyes, ill-suited for inhabitants of a world devoid of light, and a pairs of fangs that protruded above and below from their thin, linear mouths. They creeped towards her, skillfully using the talons on their limbs to cling to the ceiling of the narrow 1.2 by 2.2 meter corridor.

<Statistically, it's not uncommon for ruins to have their guards, at least in some shape or form.>

"A bit much for there to be this many though."

<The statistics vary by region.>

The two continued to casually converse without a care even as the monsters began converging on their target. Their appetite would be beyond imagining,

seeing new prey for what could be the first time in hundreds-... no, tens of thousands of years.

<There's a possibility of parasitic infection. Take care not to get bitten.>

"You think I'm that dumb?"

<Just making sure.>

The girl clicked her tongue in annoyance. Her unseen partner on the other side seemed to be greatly underestimating her abilities.

"Well, whatever. Hatter, please give me a report on the Trump Soldiers and their movements."

<Tracking and analysis mode deployed. I've instructed March Hare to recover any remaining Cards as well.>

"Good thing we came prepared for just about anything."

<The 3 Queens having unanimously approved of this mission, there were fewer restrictions to take account of.>

"About that, did we find any clues as to Mom's whereabouts?"

<That's currently unknown.>

While they talked, the monsters slowly crowded closer and closer, waiting for the girl to drop her guard.

"Sorry, but I'm not on the menu."

The girl smashed the waterproof case that hung from the belt around her waist. As if on cue, the monsters all leapt at her at once with unbelievable speed. A thin membrane stretched between the thorny protuberances extending from their backs to serve as wings, allowing them to come flying in like bats, though, the girl showed no signs of concern even then.

From within the waterproof case came weapons that one would easily describe as "peculiar". Calling them handguns would be a bit of a disservice, considering how eye-catching these things looked, not to mention the dagger attached to the guns' grips. First impressions would tell you that these would likely make for awfully inconvenient things. One wrong move and you could

easily hurt yourself with the attached dagger.

And yet, the girl wielded the guns with a comfortable second nature, pulling the triggers with little hesitation towards the group of monsters, her "Muzzle Rush" tearing up the darkness. In her right hand, the jet black "Angra Mainyu", in her left, the silver "Aeshma". The gunshots from each, left and right, echoed through the corridor consecutively. Countless needles shot out from the muzzles, scattering as they ripped through the monsters' flesh and even biting into the surface of the wall to the far end of her.

"That was more than seven assailants there."

The girl let out a whistle before she realized it; the power from the armorpiercing Needle Flechettes had neutralized the monsters in an instant.

<You have limited ammunition. Against opponents of that caliber, you should make use of your daggers.>

"No thanks. Fighting off these Chupacabras at close range lacks a certain elegance."

<It lacks elegance?>

"Yeah. There's a certain need for aesthetics when on an adventure, wouldn't you say?"

Smiling faintly in the darkness, the girl quickly reloaded her ammunition.

"Anyways, didn't think I'd find a nest of Chupacabras here."

Chupacabra. Not quite the UMA she thought it was at first, this one being well familiar with her, they suddenly appeared in the Caribbean's small island of Puerto Rico around 1995. It's name coming from the word "Goat-Sucker", from the local language. As its name suggests, it is a blood-sucking monster that extracts blood and bodily fluids from its victims with a sharp, needle-like tongue.

The images the girl viewed through her goggles were being examined in real time by her current communication partner, the woman called "Hatter".

"I wonder how they survived here for so long, what did these guys feed on?"

<We have no data on that.>

Though she answered right away, Hatter's tone carried a hint of worry in it. The girl could guess why. After all, it wasn't that much of a stretch to say that the distance between Puerto Rico and here was rather short. There might be a secret passage between the two that only these creatures knew of.

"Alright, additional orders for the Trump Soldiers. If they encounter a Chupacabra, kindly have them dispose of it. The Trump Soldiers have nothing to worry about anyways, not like they have any bodily fluids to get sucked out of them."

<Additional instructions, acknowledged.>

A chance encounter meant a slight change to the girl's plans, leading to her new orders to Hatter. Still, it was not as if she came here with the hope of finding these Chupacabras and chasing them around. She had other things in mind than monster hunting.

The Vimana hovered directly above the undersea pyramid, analyzing the data sent from the Trump Soldiers and March Hare while maintaining an altitude of three hundred meters over sea level.

The air currents here were far from stable, requiring frequent altitude readjustments to the ship, but it was about as far as the Vimana could be allowed to distance itself from the pyramid while still being able to receive and confirm data from inside it. Had there not been a thick layer of seawater between it and the pyramid, the Vimana would be fine staying at a more stable altitude instead. Although, the possibility of the girl in the pyramid needing backup due to some kind of emergency was also a factor to consider, thus this position could be called an acceptable compromise.

"All Clubs were annihilated, two Hearts survived, six Diamonds survived, eleven Swords survived^[2]". All Chupacabras up until N block have been terminated."

Inside the Vimana's control bridge, located in a gondola beneath the airship, a raven haired woman wearing a silk-hat low enough as to shadow her eyes nonchalantly read aloud the results of the battle between Trump Soldiers and Chupacabras as displayed on a monitor.

The female trespasser down in the pyramid had an information terminal but

with very limited processing capabilities, as such, an arrangement where she sent up raw data to the airborne Vimana and later received the fully processed data was key. The woman in the Vimana in charge of relaying this information was known as Hatter, and the girl in the pyramid was her Mistress.

And the name of that Mistress, the one who operated the Attack Device to melt through the Pyramid's outer wall, the one sneaking around inside of it at this very moment and of course, one of the 5 best Treasure Hunters in the World, was Alice.

<Let me know when the Trump Soldiers are done with their search.>

Alice's voice instructed from the speakers attached to Hatter's headset.

"Understood, Professor."

Within the dimly lit gondola, the monitors shone as the only light source, projecting several multicolored lights moving about in the submerged pyramid. The white colored blip standing at the center of the 600 meter deep pyramid indicated Alice's position.

Details regarding the contents of the submerged pyramid continued coming in and before long, the movement of the blue light points on the map finally came to a full stop. "The Swords have reached the deepest area. Route clear. Trump Soldiers, proceed with your additional mission."

<Hatter, transfer the map to my terminal.>

Hatter had just finished the three-dimensional analysis of the underwater pyramid as she heard the voice through the headset begin to voice the new order. She forwarded the data.

The terminal equipped to the backhand of Alice's diver's suit beeped to signal the transfer of data.

She spread out the scroll-like screen attached to the terminal to confirm both her current position and the shortest route to her destination. While it looked similar enough to the pyramids of Egypt from the outside, the same couldn't be said about the insides. There were no long or large corridors in here, in fact, it

was a bit of a mystery how this thing even managed to support its own weight, let alone the weight of the ocean around it. Rather, the pyramid had innumerable pits all around, heading upwards and downwards deeper within and, according to the map, with only one of the pits actually stretching all the way downwards to the deepest area of the structure. A depth of about 50 meters, where a large hall seemed to be located.

As Alice released the screen, it folded back on itself automatically behind her glove.

There were better things to do here than play with Chupacabras like some kid at the zoo. Alice headed straight over the edge of the pit and, after approaching the hole without a hint of worry, casually took a step into thin air.

"Let's Go!"

With a happy-go-lucky shout, she began to free fall. Naturally, Alice had something to slow her descent, a device attached to her belt which she activated with a calm gesture. Her inertial control system.

This piece of state-of-the-art technology was easily one of the more versatile tools carried by Alice. Not quite antigravity, but with a simple adjustment to how much inertia one is subjected to, even a five hundred meter drop becomes the same as going down a flight of stairs.

The world here was an abyss devoid of light. So it was also a good thing she had her 'Eyes of Sound', aka her 'echolocation' or sonar goggles, equipped or she wouldn't be seeing much to begin with.

The hall where Alice landed had a semi-circular dome-like ceiling. Beyond the hole she had used, others were scattered here and there on the ceiling. Apparently that hadn't been the only entrance after all.

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"Say, Hatter."
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<What is it, Professor?>

"Do you detect any human beings down here? You know, besides me of course."

< I can't detect any.>

Hatter replied immediately from the Vimana.

"Hmm, that so."

Alice's gaze shifted from the ceiling to the center of the hall. On top of a 3 foot tall column with a foot wide diameter, a model ship of around the same size sat untouched and in plain sight.

According to the material analysis from the sonar goggles, the model was made out of high purity gold too.

"Bingo! Hatter, check this out!"

<There is no doubt about it. The Golden Boat.>

A golden jet similar looking to modern spacecrafts^[3], a golden vehicle that was the very spitting image of modern day bulldozers^[4], models such as these had previously been found in South America and were known as Geometric OOPArts. The golden boat in Alice's sights was one such Geometric OOPArt. It was one among many ancient relics her mother had once pursued.

"Add this one and we'll have the whole set."

The miniature jet of the sky, the bulldozer of the earth, and now, the boat of the sea was hers. Alice slowly approached what had to be one of the most priceless artefacts of all known ancient South American civilization...

"Wha-?"

She stopped. Several Card pieces fell to the floor, showering all around the center hall where she stood. Alice's eyebrows raised in astonishment. There was no doubt about it, these cards were the remains of a Trump Soldier.

"Hatter, your analysis?"

<Judging from the damage, there is a high likelihood that this Trump Soldier was attacked with a high-intensity laser.>

"Laser?"

Alice paused, were Chupacabras known for having a power like that? As far as she knew, they weren't capable of anything nearly as worrisome as shooting laser beams from their eyes. That fight from earlier would have been a whole lot

scarier if they could do that.

If that wasn't the case, maybe some kind of still-active defense mechanism within the ruins? Though making use of a high intensity energy weapon by harnessing the power of the sun was a bit of a cliché, it seemed pretty unlikely, what with it being impossible for sunlight to reach the ocean floor.

And if there were any other source of energy down here, it would have been detected through the analysis of the area beforehand. Alice would have most certainly had March Hare and the Trump Soldiers find and secure something like that before rushing in herself if that were the case.

That left but one possible conclusion. Someone arrived here before Alice did, someone able to slip through the detection network laid out by her team. And Alice had a pretty good idea of who would do just that considering the situation.

She took a deep breath and raised her voice loud enough for it to echo in the hall.

"I know you're here! Show yourself!"

"Uhi, uhihihihi..."

A weird sounding laugh echoed throughout the hall and at that very moment, a powerful light shone down on Alice from someplace up on the ceiling. In an instant, the jet-black darkness that had devoured the room was now engulfed in lights, giving it all a dramatic flair similar to being on a theater stage. If Alice hadn't switched her goggles to sonar mode, she probably would have gotten blinded by the sudden burst of lights.

"Good grief..."

Looking at the numerical value of neighboring radiance displayed on her goggles, Alice realized there wasn't any point to keeping sonar mode active any longer. She pushed up her goggles, squinting her eyes slightly.

Her red pupils caught sight of silver armor. On the opposite side of the hall, a 3 meter tall giant made of silver stood upright. The strange laughter coming from somewhere in the suit of armor stopped and it bowed to Alice in a courtly manner.

<It has been too long, Lady Alice.>

A calm, dignified voice came from speakers within the giant. Its silver armor, polished to a mirror's sheen, reflected Alice's figure.

"Long time no see, Lumberjack."

Lumberjack being the giant wrapped in silver armor of course.

As noted earlier, Alice knew of few who could fool her sonar sensors, the Trump Soldier's enemy detecting abilities, and her other high grade sensors like that. Lumberjack's stealth capabilities were derived from the very same supertechnology Alice made use of, and because of that, he gave her a fair deal of trouble.

"You don't show up on any of my sensors, yet you make no efforts to hide from plain sight. Typical."

<Should revealing my large frame suffice to deter opponents, then I may as well, it'll avoid needless confrontation.>

"That sure sounds like something you'd say. So, for a wimp like you to be in a place like this and still be keeping a level head, I'm gonna assume Dorothy is with you, right?"

"Huuuh? How did you guess?"

In complete contrast to Lumberjack's butler like voice, a girlish voice very much like the strange laugh from earlier resounded from within the silver giant.

<M-Milady!?>

Before Lumberjack could fully voice his dismay, the massive chest plate on him opened up.

"Dorothy..."

Alice could feel a headache coming up.

"Uhihi! Good evening!"

With a flip of her honey blond hair, a young girl, with a distinctly rich mademoiselle-like air and looks to match that cheerful tone of hers, stepped out of Lumberjack.

Dorothy Lorena Baum. Daughter to the multi-millionaire Baum Family and one of the few Treasure Hunters the same age as Alice. Also known as the "Good Luck Fairy". This was a girl who acted on random impulses and hunches whilst good fortune took care of the rest. It worked for her to such an extent you'd think she was blessed by the heavens themselves. You could call her something of a polar opposite to Alice.

"I've beaten you to the punch once again, Allie! Aren't I just the best!?"

Devoid of the definition to the word "tact", something that Alice could attest to, Dorothy was nothing but smiles.

"And here I had no idea that the tunnel we found in Puerto Rico would lead us directly to our goal either. I guess what they say is true, the proof is in the pudding."

Did years of meticulous planning, all with the Foundation's full support, really just get one-upped by something as simple as "the proof is in the pudding"...? Alice drooped her shoulders with a weary expression about her. Reading the mood was something Alice had long given up on teaching Dorothy at this point.

"But anyways, this is it! My victory is at hand!"

With most of her body still inside the upper half of Lumberjack's body, Dorothy took on a guts pose. Lumberjack acted in perfect sync to Dorothy's movements, taking on a guts pose of his own.

"Remember this well, Allie! For today's the day Dolly made you taste defeat!" With a *snap*, Dorothy pointed to Alice in a dramatic fashion.



"Ki... kishishishishi."

Alice burst into laughter, her face still facing down to the ground.

"W-What is it? Why are you laughing like that!?"

"Foolish child, you really need me to spell it out for you, don't you?"

Alice's cackling stopped and she unraveled the whip she had wrapped around her waist.

"Think about it, you come here ahead of me, have all this time to prepare your lighting equipment and everything. Whatever happened to the part where you actually grab the treasure?"

".....Ah."

Dorothy's mouth opened wide.

<L-Lady Alice is right!>

Lumberjack reached out for the Golden Boat.

"As if!"

Alice's whip snatched up the relic before Lumberjack could make it.

"And there we go. Treasure secured-!"

"Ahn", not fair! That's simply not fair!! I was really looking forward to seeing Allie get all upset toooooo"!!

Dorothy, still leaning out from Lumberjack's body, swung an arm around in frustration.

<That's dangerous Milady!>

Involuntarily matching Dorothy's movements in sync, Lumberjack swung his arm too, though his with a buzzing sound. Alice gave them a sideways glance before quickly putting the Golden Boat away in the pressure-resistant case she had on her back.

"Hatter, I was able to secure the target."

<Congratulations, by the way, there's something I need to report, Professor.>

Hatter's voice replied from the communication device.

"The way you're putting it, it sounds like..."

<We have a Code D.>

"Ah-, naturally. I'll be fine, don't you worry."

A Code D. Alice smiled wryly; among all the traps to have planted in a ruin housing a treasure, that particular code letter was assigned to the most dangerous of the bunch, the self-destruction type.

<Withdraw immediately.>

"Roger that. I wasn't planning on staying here much longer anyways."

After Alice cut off communication, she turned to Dorothy, who was in the process of stamping her foot on the ground in dismay, making Lumberjack stomp his foot as well.

"Hey Dorothy! Listen up, I'm only telling you this on account of us being childhood friends."

"W-Whaat is it. Allie?"

"Everything here's going to collapse soon. You'd better get moving."

Alice shot a wire gun up towards the hole in the ceiling where she had dropped in from as she informed Dorothy. Inertial control was pretty great for descending, not so much for climbing back up however.

"What!? You're kidding, a Code D!?"

"You got it. Now if you'll excuse me~"

Alice shot a wink to Dorothy before activating the wire gun's motors. As if sucked into the sky, Alice's figure vanished in a flash.

She hurriedly made her way back to the Attack Device "White Rabbit" she had originally used to get here and settled into its operating position, which was something akin to riding a bike really. The hatch closed in response.

A digital display stood out dimly in the darkness of the Attack Device. The top right corner displayed the coordinate date of the White Rabbit's current position and right below it, a display of the estimated time before the self-destruction sequence flooded the pyramid, as analyzed by the Vimana.

"Looks like I made it just in the nick of time."

Alice quickly fastened the harness to her body as she muttered.

<Five, four, three, two, one.>

A monstrous tremor shook the White Rabbit as the countdown reached Zero. The outer walls of the ruin had just collapsed and the rest of it was going down with it thanks to the water pressure. The tremendous air pressure released by the underwater pyramid was thankfully more than enough for Alice to make her escape with aboard the White Rabbit, she began her ascent.

"Hatter, requesting retrieval."

<Understood. What became of Lady Dorothy?>

"She's with Lumberjack. She'll live."

Alice's vessel slowly emerged from the sea, together with a mass of air bubbles.

"At least I can get to work on the next phase now."

As a prerequisite to Alice inheriting the Dodgson Foundation, the 3 Queens, current administrators of the Foundation, had decided Alice was to complete this task.

Alice gave control over to the white Rabbit's autopilot and took the Golden Boat out from its pressure resistant case, she gave it a good long look.

"Hn?"

Alice's look turned grim with discomfort. Something didn't feel right.

"I'd better have Hatter check this out ASAP."

A small island in the South Pacific. This island, its existence erased from maps all around the globe, housed a base which contained various super-machines for the Treasure Hunter Alice to make use of.

Deep within, in a dark computer room lit only by the light of the liquid-crystal display of a screen, was the figure of a woman wearing a crimson red dress. Her eyes were locked onto the data displayed on the screen, data sent from the

Vimana.

"The 'Gate Opener' noticed the third one was a fake."

The woman murmured at the display, a thin smile crossing her lips.

"The time is upon us, My Queen."

A male voice came from somewhere in the shadows behind her.

"Very well. Let's start by having the Songstress take the next treasure."

The woman told the shadow in an unperturbed tone.

"By your will..."

"Make sure you don't let them discover your true identity."

The woman backed away from the monitor and slowly, she vanished, blending into the darkness of the room.

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Chapter 1: Irukinuf's Songstress

"Ah", so disappointing."

Alice was inside the limousine that would take her to her school, St. Label's Academy. She took a look at the results of Hatter's investigation on the golden boat, conducted while she was sleeping, then rested her body on the seatbelt and hung her head.

"Still, "Profeshor", wasn't your intuition proven true~, pyon?"^[5]

The woman in a bunny-girl costume driving the limousine spoke in a soothing tone like a comedian, while swinging her rabbit ears. She was one of the members of the Dodgson Foundation in charge of operating machinery, an artificial life form with the codename: "March Hare."

"Intuition is important, pyon. We "hocumuluns", March Hare included, don't have anything like that, pyon."

Though her tone was rather thoughtless, one could feel she was worried about Alice. In these situations, she preferred having March Hare around to Hatter.

"It's just, it makes no sense for this to have been crafted out of pure gold."

A display was equipped in front of the rear seat of the limousine Alice sat on. It was projecting the image of the golden boat they had obtained from the submarine pyramid last night. According to the data displayed next to the image, the analysis of the golden boat revealed that it was a lump of pure gold. Even though it might be worth some amount if one considered the historical value too, when compared to the full cost of this search expedition, it didn't nearly cover the expenses.

"Good grief, a waste of energy at best." [6]

Alice's lips turned sour.

"If we had only obtained even one new technology, we'd have made a killing."

For Treasure Hunters, these original golden series of artifacts had a special meaning. Namely, they held within them data of internal structures and designs. In other words, the golden jet was an elaborate real miniature that utilized flight technology unknown to humans yet, and the same went for the golden bulldozer. As a result, they had been able to discover many technologies involving the powertrain from the golden bulldozer; the huge airship Vimana Alice was using also employed plenty of technology obtained from the golden jet.

By restoring Lost Technology in the present era, the Dodgson Foundation had successfully monopolized unprecedented super-technology like no other. This time, she had been counting on obtaining some innovating technology not only about movement on and under water, but about water pressure and decompression sickness as well from the golden boat, so it was quite a big shock, too.

"With this, I think we might not be able to use the Foundation's heavy equipment for a while, pyon."

"Hahn~~~~"

Alice gave a sigh with all her might. Most of the top front end equipment she used as a Treasure Hunter was managed and administrated by her family at the Dodgson Foundation. According to the instructions that Lewis, Alice's mother and administrator of the Foundation, had left behind after going missing, not even her biological daughter Alice was allowed to use the Foundation's equipment at will.

"Well, nothing we can do about it. Let's put up with the tedious daily routine for the time being. Farewell for now, days of fun adventures!"

Alice resigned herself, fully theatrical, and looked outside the window. A girl in a light brown cape and a white skirt was walking by^[7]. Those were the same clothes Alice was wearing. That was conventionally called a school uniform.

Though wearing a short uniform skirt was popular these days, when it came to girls' skirt length, the one which attracted the most attention after all was this

one they wore, that could already be called "micromini". The students and connoisseurs made fun of the "St. Label's Academy" name, parodying and calling it "Navels Academy". [8]

Though they couldn't clearly tell when it had happened, this was considered normal by now, and it had a very high male support. According to one theory, the Headmaster had shortened the skirt length to make the students behave properly, by using their own shame. Certainly, in order to prevent anyone else from seeing their underwear with that skirt length, they had to walk carefully so that their skirt wouldn't wave, and they had to close their thighs properly when they sat down on a chair. Forcibly being obedient meant they couldn't help but to mind their manners too.

That said, even if she leant over a bit, her round ass cheeks showed too, that was troubling as well...

"I always think, the skirt's length is the only thing I can do nothing about."

"Profeshor's combat uniform shows even more underwear, pyon."

"That's fine, because it's a symbol of the extraordinary! And I'm not ashamed even if my underwear is showing, either!"

Along with the special black protective suit Alice called her battle suit, she wore white underwear that had nanomicron units woven into it with the necessary functions for living body preservation.

They absolutely aren't just panties!

As she argued with March Hare, she delicately adjusted her skirt's waist.

"Well, etiquette aside, this length is troubling for the day-to-day."

Alice left for St. Label's Academy like a schoolgirl. If one considered her age, this wouldn't be odd, but she had already graduated from the university at an accelerated class, and had obtained a PhD. She taught as a Professor as often as twice a week, and could easily become a University teacher.

Despite that, she was just a schoolgirl here, due to the troublesome family precepts her mother had left her.

"Those who don't know the day-to-day, and don't enjoy it, have no right to

taste the extraordinary."

Because of her mother Lewis' words, Alice had to carry on living an everyday life appropriate for her age. Though student life was extremely boring for Alice by now, if she didn't fulfill the family precepts, she wouldn't be allowed to use the equipment, facilities and all the various machinery owned by the Foundation. That's why, she reluctantly chose the somewhat mediocre St. Label's Academy where daughters of millionaires attended, since it was the one closest to her house.

The limousine stopped stylishly in front of the school gate.

"Profeshor, here we are, pyon. Ten minutes before "rome-hoom" starts, truly bus-like timing, pyon." [9]

Moving her bunny ears with a *blip blop*, March Hare informed her of their arrival.

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"Sii~~~igh..."
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The door opened automatically, and Alice got out, lazy all over.

"I'll pick you up at the usual time, pyon. Contact me if there's any change, pyon."

"Yeah, yeah. Drive safely back home, now."

March Hare responded to Alice's words by swinging her ears. With a calm sound, the jet black limousine slowly left the school gate.

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"Well now..."
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Just as Alice turned her gaze to the school, the sound of a great displacement engine roared up, and the huge frame ran off with a daring accelerator turn.

"That foolish bunny, right after I told her to drive safe, too."

Murmuring so that the nearby students wouldn't hear her, Alice tightly clenched her fist, intending to go over this with her later.

"Oh my, Miss Bunny is as hasty as ever."

A voice called out to Alice.

"At this rate, she'll take you to Wonderland, Allie."

"Since she's March Hare, she'll take you to the tea party."

The voice continued with an "Uhihi" laughter. That was a voice she knew so well. Since, as she recalled, she had left her behind at the submarine pyramid off the Panama coast barely ten hours ago.

"Dorothy. You punctually came to school. Well done, well done."

Guessing the voice's owner without even looking back, Alice began to walk with a bored look.

"(Angry) When you greet someone, you have to properly look them in the face." [10]

The owner of the voice, Dorothy, trotted up till she reached Alice.

"Good grief."

Alice faced Dorothy with a sharp turn good enough for a dancer, and looked at her from toe to hair. She had soft, delicate features without a scratch in them, reminiscent of a French doll, and her uniform fit her like a glove, not even one extra wrinkle in it. Her skirt's pleats never waved at all; if it was her, even the skirt's extreme length was something that just made her all the lovelier.

"Well aren't you flawless?"

"Yeah, I am flawless. Though, if I had the golden boat you took from me, Allie, I'd be just perfect."

"Ah-, about that."

Alice muttered in a tired tone, turning towards the school building's entrance.

"It was a fake."

"Eh?"

"I'll give you more details after school, in the Literature Club."

Just like any school that had a place where books were stored for education, St. Label's Academy also had a library. But, since the collection's scale was far superior in the case of this school, it was called the Book Building.

Four floors above ground, with a two-store basement. Great floors with bookshelves taller than an ordinary person had been filled with tightly packed, lined up books from the east and west, old and young. This had been due to the skill of the librarian that had been newly appointed there a few years ago; with the current book collection of the remodeled Book Building, it had swollen to a scope where they took the lead among domestic libraries.

In a corner of the Book Building, a rare handwritten plate had been hanged under the librarian booth's signboard: "Literature Club." That was the name of the club based on the Book Building, that had many club activities. Matching the scale of the Book Building's collection of books, there were no less than two rooms with librarian booths on each floor, for a total of 20 rooms. Since the number of clubrooms was higher than the number of librarians, one of the available rooms had been set aside as the room for the literature club.

After school, at the librarian's booth there were several men and women who belonged to the literature club.

"So: after we ran some analysis, it's just an ornament of ordinary gold."

Alice told Dorothy, sitting opposite her. Spreading two notebooks on the table, she used both her hands deftly, and recorded memos with different contents in each one. Perfecting moving her left and right hands independently, that also was training for using at will her tricky pistols with daggers, the black Angra Mainyu and the silver Aeshma.

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"Hm~ph, so you Allie too?"

"Too"?"
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Twitch, Alice's ears perked up hearing Dorothy's words.

"Yes. See, there was the crystal cube I obtained last time."

"Ah, that time where our Hatter unusually fell behind."

A crystal cube had been discovered in the Arctic Ocean's ice. As there had been rumors about a supposed legacy concerning the secrets of life, a battle had unfolded on the Arctic's sea ice approximately two months ago.

"That was fake too."

"Eh?"

"Yeah, it was fake. When we analyzed its components, it turned out to be ordinary crystal."

Given the age of the layer of ice it had been buried into, even by just processing the crystal once, so much should have been discovered about the change in the earth's crust that it'd overturn the current theories.

"According to the "folklore", the cube's surface should have been engraved with data indicating how life sprang forth. But, we didn't find any pattern like that there, even after scanning it with an electron microscope, though."

Hearing Dorothy coming out with it, Alice noticed a few points in common. As she continued writing on both notebooks at the same time, Alice decided she'd drop Dorothy a hint. She'd come to realize them too.

"Say, Dorothy."

"Wha~at~?"

"I wonder if there are any common features between that crystal cube and the golden boat."

"Both are fake."

Her reply came in a flash. It probably clocked under 0.5 seconds.

"Think a little more before answering immediately, you mudhead!"

" "Mudhead"! "Mudhead"? That's not a nice thing to say!"

"When I asked about a common feature, I didn't mean that particularly. Think well~~~!"

"Mm~~~"

Dorothy pursed her lips in a frown, and closed her eyes. She was by no means unintelligent. She was a little insecure about her memory and her calculating ability, was all. The same went for her prowess as a Treasure Hunter, one could say she was almost neck and neck with Alice. Otherwise, she wouldn't have been able to keep being her rival up to that point.

"Dorothy?"

There was no answer.

Alice released her pen and turned to Dorothy. Dorothy was...

"Zzz-"

She had fallen asleep. Alice silently picked up her eraser, and shot it in retaliation.

Thwack! The eraser hit right in the middle of Dorothy's forehead.

"Byaih!?"

With a short scream, Dorothy lost her balance and tipped over her chair.

Everybody turned their heads when they heard the sudden sound. But, when they saw that Dorothy had fallen down, they all went like "What, the usual", lost interest and went back to their own work.

The good thing about that school's Literature Club was that their individualism was thorough. Except when someone made the news as they worked on the bimonthly club journal, provided it was about a subject that tickled their intellectual curiosity, none of the members were interested in the others. In fact, even though Alice and Dorothy usually talked openly about the OOPArts they had obtained, there was no actual harm. Since they were debating lively as part of the Literature Club, one could only think they were creating some new story.

If this had been a sports-related club, it wouldn't have worked this way. As clubs were based on people working together, actions that disturbed the discipline weren't allowed. So, when they got fired up talking about things like OOPArts, regarded as fringe topics, they got singled out as weirdos, as was the logical outcome.

Besides, Alice wasn't confident at being able to hide her outstanding physical ability, and in Dorothy's case, she'd probably try and stand out without giving it a second thought. There were too many inconveniences for Alice to stealthily act as a Treasure Hunter. First of all, Alice didn't have any hobbies like meeting with everyone at sports to praise each other's effort, or devoting herself to her studies with the aim of getting full marks.

Use your own abilities for yourself. That was her creed.

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"Uugh, you're mean, Allie."
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Holding both her forehead and the back of her head, Dorothy dizzily stood up.

"I wasn't doing anything like sleeping. I just closed my eyes a little to think."

"Say that nonsense after you wipe the drool off your mouth."

"Uhih?!"

Dorothy took out a handkerchief from her chest pocket, and fixed her mouth in a hurry.

"H-Hey... There's the case of Edgar Cayce too, you can come up with great answers while sleeping!" [11]

Dorothy rebutted, moving her arms noisily.

"So you admit you were sleeping."

"Ugyuh!?"

"If you could predict things at the same level as Edgar Cayce in your naps, this world wouldn't need informers."

Edgar Cayce used an ability called Reading, contacted the cosmic awareness called "Akashic Records" [12] while under a state of hypnosis, and left behind many prophecies. Among the connoisseurs, he was said to be one of the world's three Major Prophets; though for Alice, who hated predictions, that was only a story with low credibility.

"But, but, I did notice one thing properly"."

"Ooh?"

Alice narrowed her eyes, waiting for Dorothy's words.

"The common point is that both have materials with similar qualities to the real thing, is that what you meant?"

Alice smiled when she heard Dorothy's answer.

"You pass. And, there's one more point in common."

[&]quot;You woke up yet?"

"One more?"

"Well, if I let you ponder about it, Dorothy, I don't think you'll come up with an answer before the end-of-term tests, so I'll say it myself."

Alice began explaining while drawing a picture in a corner of her notebook.

"For example, suppose that there are two pictures here."

"Hm-hm."

"One piece is the genuine article. The other's fake. Even if both pictures are similar, there's a world of difference in their values."

Even Dorothy could manage to stay with her so far.

"The problem comes now. See, if both the genuine article and the fake are something old like the cave paintings of Tassili-n-Ajjer in the Sahara, wouldn't the fake be worthy enough?"

"If it was the first fake of humankind, it'd be a breakthrough."

"Well, what is known in the world as OOPArts currently, is as their very name implies: "Out of Place Artifacts". That is, devices considered impossible to have been crafted with the techniques of the time they're certified to have been produced. This is why they're considered so strange and valued so high. But, the likes of pieces of gear or crystal crafts, those are just ornaments, in short. What a Treasure Hunter like me is looking for, on the other hand, are the OOPArts we call "original," that contain super technology that surpasses even modern civilization."

Both of Alice's guns, and the huge airship Vimana too, were products of Lost Technology obtained from OOPArts.

"So far, after seeing many "ornamental" OOPArts, I've been wondering if "original" ones actually existed from the start. But, since there are actually "original" ones among them, what if someone had secretly substituted them for fakes long ago?"

"I see. If someone had substituted them for fakes an absurdly long time ago, they'd get a proper treatment as OOPArts even if they're fakes."

"It's as you say. So, the important thing here is to infer the period when they

were secretly substituted, from the circumstances surrounding their discovery."

In fact, the Dodgson Foundation also owned several OOPArts that were secretly substituted for fakes with similar materials than the genuine articles. Of those, the first kind are more than a hundred thousand years old, to distinguish them from the second kind of OOPArts, more recent. There was a common feature among the first class too: though it was usually said their age was around a hundred thousand years, their range extended to tens of millions of years. Whenever they were found with no signs of having been excavated, it was safe to assume they had gotten buried naturally in there sometime around the previous range of years.

There was still a problem. Namely, there existed evidence of OOPArts having been excavated. Whether they were relics from tens of millions of years old, there were traces of excavations from a hundred thousand years old, or as old as twelve thousand years ago, even those traces were interesting for the archeologists. When investigated decades ago, it also clearly settled that those OOPArts there were fakes; maybe the "originals" had been secretly replaced by those.

"In other words, the act of secretly substituting an OOPArt for a fake might have been something repeated often since the olden days."

"That might be so, though I don't want to think much about it..."

It was common for fakes to have their materials somewhat similar to the genuine articles. In the case of grave robbing, witty thieves might prepare a fake. But, were there any group of thieves who used pure gold and crystal similar to the genuine article for their fakes? Though the substitutions were widespread enough to have been separated in time, could a copycat from a different time possibly have done something this time-consuming matching their predecessors to this extent?

Alice declared with an unusual serious expression:

"There may be "someone" secretly replacing OOPArts with something in mind. With such a scale as tens of thousands of years ago, too."

Glup.

Dorothy swallowed her saliva.

"What a terrible enemy."

Both the Dodgson Foundation and Dorothy's Baum Foundation were big conglomerates that had been developed based on the technology heritage obtained from OOPArts. It'd be overly optimistic to think there hadn't been any other similar groups in the past history elsewhere. And, assuming that to be the case, it'd be an enemy who had continuously, skillfully hid its presence for a long time.

Though one could think Alice had made rapid progress about this, there was a cue that had led Alice to arrive to these conclusions. It was the contents of the report that had arrived earlier from the staff of the Dodgson Foundation, that went to check the cave from Puerto Rico leading to the submarine pyramid, as discovered by Dorothy. Although the submarine tunnel itself that extended from the cave was fairly old, they had discovered a point midway through where a collapsed part had been re-dug. The excavation marks were quite new, from around the 1990's.

It couldn't be said for certain, but there was the possibility that the fake golden boat had been secretly substituted around that time as well. Maybe, the time when the Chupacabras began to appear suddenly in Puerto Rico too, 1995, was related to when the submarine tunnel opened.

Assuming they had substituted it secretly and had left without even triggering the ruins' collapse trap, aka Code D...

"It seems our opponent is as good as us at handling OOPArts, or even better. And there's the possibility that they keep working at secretly substituting OOPArts even now."

Alice put her index fingers to her lips. That was her habit when she decided to challenge an opponent.

"Ah, I know what you want to do, Allie."

Dorothy clapped her hands, and went on.

"While exploring still unrecovered OOPArts, you're going to drag that "someone" out."

"Glad you understand. That should speed things along."

"So, here's the next target, then."

Dorothy started talking in rapid succession.

"I see you're ready enough."

Alice smiled wryly.

"Uhihihihi, and it fits our purposes to a T."

Dorothy proudly presented a one-sheet printout.

"How about the "Salzburg Cube"? It's quite likely to be an "original" OOPArt, with information on an unknown metal." [13]

The Salzburg Cube. On 1885, at a cast iron factory in the north of Austria, a metal cuboid was discovered inside large chunks of coal that were being finely ground for fuel. Composed of nickel carbon, its percentage of sulfur seemed too small for a natural object. Since it had a quite accurate rectangular parallelepiped shape, it was considered to be a man-made work.

Besides, according to Gurlt, the expert said to be the discoverer of this device, it was said that the coal surrounding the metal cuboid was Ignite from the Cretaceous Period, approximately 70,000 years old. This topic was printed in a well-known scientific magazine in its 1886 issue, but since the analysis technology of the time wasn't as refined as that of today, there are rumors about its authenticity even today.

"That's one of the missing OOPArts your family is often looking for."

"Uhihihi."

Dorothy's flat chest puffed up with pride.

"Allie, do you know where the Salzburg Cube is?"

"The real one was lost during World War II, it seems the one they have in the Salzburg underground resources museum is just a model."

"Right. Then, where is the genuine article?"

Alice frowned. It should appear in the list her mother Lewis, leading the Dodgson Foundation, had left behind, in virtue of her investigating exhaustively

all the traditions around the world and finding undiscovered treasures.

The OOPArt that was the Salzburg Cube had already been found by someone else, it was just now that it had gone missing. Naturally, that wouldn't be written in her mother's list, so without having Hatter investigate it for her, it was an item that completely flew under Alice's radar.

"You don't know?"

Dorothy smiled triumphantly, while Alice clenched her back teeth. Though it wasn't pleasant to show weakness to this girl, it wasn't that bad to concede victory every now and then if she could be given a clear explanation.

"Yeah, yeah, I don't know. Please tell me, teacher Dorothy."

She replied in monotone to Dorothy's words.

"Uhihihihi. Actually, it's in Moscow."

"Moscow?"

"At the time of World War II, it seems the Soviet Forces took it away. Without noticing the worth of the goods, apparently the Salzburg Cube is still lying inside the Museum of the Soviet Army." [14]

"Museum of the Soviet Army~?"

The Museum of the Soviet Army was under military jurisdiction, rather than civilian. The security level should also be more severe, in a totally different class than ordinary museums.

"Shall we do a treasure scramble game for the first time in a while? Tonight, that is."

"Tonight~? I wonder what I should do."

Alice was being evasive. The various equipment under the control of the Foundation, including her main backup, the huge airship Vimana, couldn't be used without the permission of the "3 Queens." Not to mention the fact that the Salzburg Cube was an item that wouldn't appear in her mother's list; she didn't think she'd get permission so easily.

Without the Vimana, it'd be impossible for her go to Moscow and return in a

day. That day being a weekday, when she considered she'd have class the following day too, she couldn't answer at a moment's notice.

"It's no good? If you can't use your family's stuff, Allie, will you ride our Twister up to Moscow? We'll start the competition on-site."

Twister was the multi-purpose aircraft owned by the Baum Foundation, Dorothy's home, and one of the few aircrafts with a performance equivalent to that of the Vimana. It was thanks to the Twister that Dorothy was able to fly around the world in the same manner as Alice.

"OK, I'll ride it."

Alice considered the unexpected suggestion and replied immediately.

"Then, I'll tell Scarecrow that we're to take a visitor on board."

As soon as Dorothy said so, she got in touch with Scarecrow, the subordinate she was proud of, through her portable terminal. Unlike Alice, Dorothy's strong point was to be able to summon the Baum Foundation's support at will.

"Oh my, I wonder if you're talking about your next project?"

A clear voice suddenly drifted over to their table. It was a redhead woman in a wine-red suit that fitted her body well. Her name: the teacher Faye Wright, who acted as an advisor to the Literature Club among the librarians, who was now sitting behind Alice before they even noticed it.

If one looked at her body, most people would notice something amiss. The left arm of her jacket was empty. That is, she was one-armed. The person herself said that she had lost her left arm due to an accident from her youth, but the truth wasn't clear. Anyway, when both the Dodgson and Baum Foundations investigated the backgrounds of the teaching staff before their admissions, they hadn't been able to find any records of her before she was appointed to this school.

That was why Alice had been wary of her since the beginning. One of the reasons why she had joined the Literature Club was to monitor her, but... If she could get behind her so easily, she could have listened to their conversation. She had been way too careless. Clicking her tongue so that no one noticed, Alice turned her eyes to Faye.

"If you have a plot, I guess I'll be looking forward to your next project?"

Faye looked at Alice's notes and gave a sweet smile. A smile without malice, that conversely stirred up Alice's wariness.

"Yes. We're hard at work."

Alice replied as she closed her notebook.

"Ahn, you meanie. Your teacher was still reading thaat."

"If you read our ideas beforehand, you'll get less enjoyment when you read the story later."

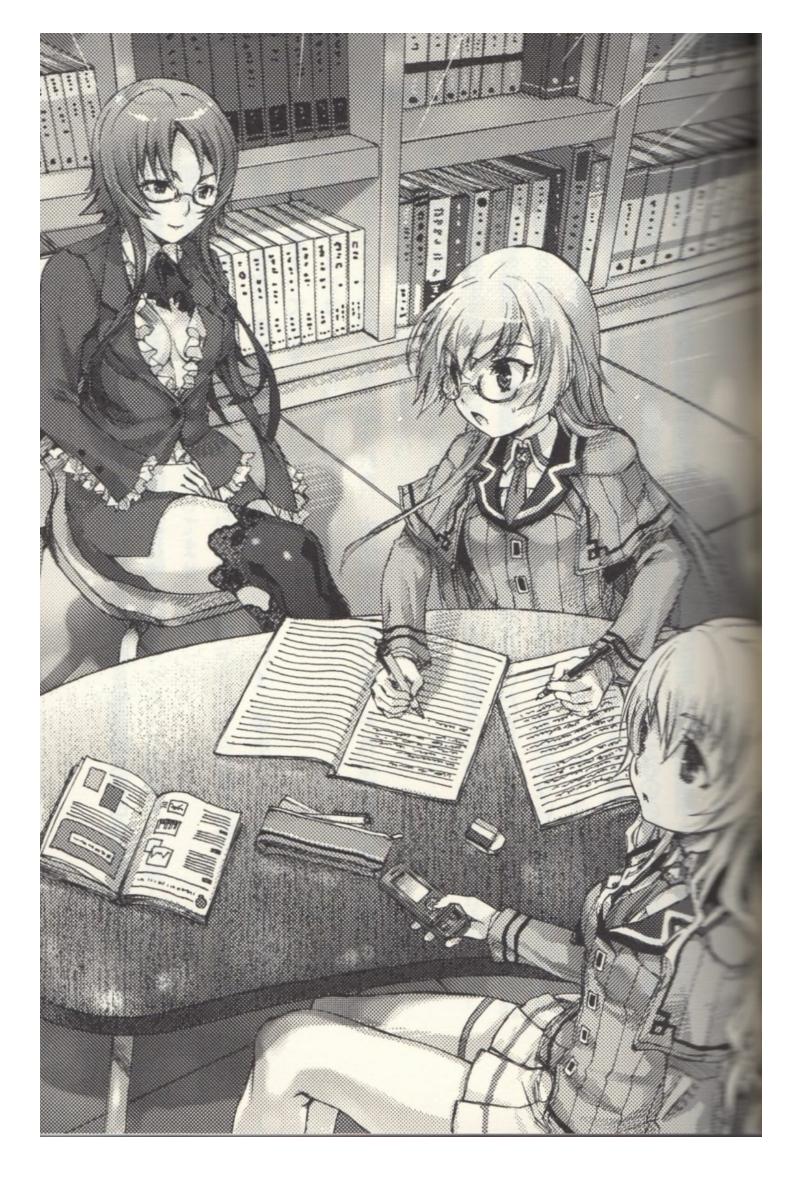
"The short story you ran on the last club journal was interesting. I want to see a continuation."

"Uhihihihi, that's great, right, Allie?"

"It was thanks to your cooperation, Dorothy."

As she returned a smile, Alice put away both her notebooks with separate contents in a bag. That was enough for the report she was to submit to her school. She had also taken note of the conversation with Dorothy.

"By the way, teacher, what was the special edition theme of the next club journal again?"



She changed the subject from her story involving treasure hunting with Dorothy, to club activities.

"Oh my, our Chief is worried about it."

"She's a Chief in name only, because she doesn't do a thing."

"It's the human extinction on 2012~"

Just as she said so, the other members around who had been indifferent so far, gathered one after the other now that the hottest, most interesting topic had begun.

"Chief, it's the Aztec Calendar!"

The moment when the Sun would lose its power was written down in the calendar of the ancient Aztec civilization. When converted to A.D., it'd become December 22nd, 2012.

"Chief, what do you think will happen when the Sun loses its power?"

"The extinction of the sunspot?"

A change in the amount of heat due to the drop in solar activity. The ancient Aztec civilization was well versed in astronomy, and it's well known that they kept a detailed observation of the Sun. There was also the possibility they had closed in on a secret of the Sun we don't know nowadays; that was a relatively convincing theory.

"I firmly defend the photon belt theory myself! [15]"

The Solar System goes around the Milky Way with a cycle of 26,000 years, and around the year 2000, it'd pass through a photon belt, a lumped ring of photons so crowded they gained mass, as it does every 11,000 years. If the Earth entered there, the magnetic field would be affected by strong electromagnetic waves, with an impact considered deadly for all life forms. And the time we'd enter the next winter solstice in 2012 would be December 22nd, that was what the Aztecs had predicted, emphasized one of the members with an occult magazine at hand.

"No, it's possible that the lack of sunlight it's caused by the dust accompanying a meteorite fall. The meteorite fall that occurred on the other side of the

Earth..."

To begin with, the members of the Literature Club were fond of discussions. Once one of those had started, it wasn't unusual for them to talk together about their theories, even if they didn't have the correct answer, until the school building close.

3 hours later. Alice's silhouette could be seen at the outskirts of Moscow.

When one had a flight ability like the Twister's, overcoming every nation's air defense system was no real trouble. With the full use of the "Active Stealth" ability, it had easily broken through Moscow's solid air defense system, a legacy from the Cold War era, and was now standing still above the Moscow river. Currently in the rightly called Invisible Mode, not even Alice could feel the Twister above her head, despite knowing it was there.

"As expected, it's cold."

Even if it was early summer, days in Moscow were rather chilly. *Brr*, Alice trembled while dressed in her jet black combat uniform. Considering its high level of exposure, her combat uniform wasn't really fit for the climate. No matter if the bare parts were guarded by a specially combined protective solution, it really didn't seem to keep her warm.

Local time, 8:00 PM.

This was a "white night," [16] one of the days in summertime that got extremely long at high latitudes, but in two hours it'd get too dark around there. On the other hand, it was not like she could take it slow and wait for the golden chance when it got dark. If she had to attend school tomorrow morning, considering the time it took to travel, she only had a little more than an hour to work here.

Towering in front of her eyes was the former Soviet Union's Museum of the Soviet Army. That was the place where the Salzburg Cube, the OOPArt Alice and Dorothy had chosen as their target this time, was supposed to be.

The building was made of red brick, something simple and sturdy in line with a totalitarian state. It had many pillars, compared with the apartment buildings

surrounding it. Had they also taken into account the possibility of using it as a fortress if necessity arose? There were few windows, and the only opening in the first floor was the front entrance. Alice overlooked the museum from a spot slightly away, and began examining the intrusion path.

"How awfully secure. Though it feels kinda showy for a museum..."

Naturally, there were some guards around the museum. Alice used the telescopic function of her goggles to try and check their equipment. A full-face ballistic resistant helmet, a pitch black BDU and body armor, bomb-proof shields, small sub-machine guns in their hands^[17]... no matter how one looked at it, they weren't just guards. With that equipment, only someone engaging terrorists directly would fit the profile.

"Rather than guards, aren't those Special Forces?"

This was bad. And this was just the first obstacle. First of all, why would those Special Forces guys be guarding this place? The current Alice had no way of guessing the chain of command and their goals. If she had the backup from the Dodgson Foundation as usual, she'd be able to obtain more detailed information, and it'd be easy to cause a distraction.

If this was the case, she'd need to change her original strategy. Pulling a few strings, she might have been able to use the stylish hand of making the troops withdraw. But, this one was a solo operation.

"When it comes to enemies, I always leave it to Hatter and the others."

Since she wasn't getting any support from the Foundation, she could only check up on Dorothy's movements. Ever since she had gotten down from the Twister, she hadn't contacted Dorothy even once. Which one of them two would return earlier to the Twister with the Salzburg Cube in hand, that was the game this time.

Incidentally, the moment Alice had gotten the chance in the past, she had given Dorothy accessories with a transmitter in them as a gift. Not only Dorothy didn't suspect them at all, she always wore them with gusto. As she intended, thanks to them she could know Dorothy's position with the press of a button.

"Now-, where would Dorothy be-?"

Dorothy's current position appeared superimposed on the map projected by her goggles.

"Eh?"

Seeing the marker representing Dorothy, Alice's composure vanished from her face.

"...She got me!"

By most definitions, one could hardly say that Dorothy was suitable for a Treasure Hunter. Apart from her physical ability, she was easily distracted, couldn't concentrate, and was bad at thinking things through. Despite that, her being a 1st class Treasure Hunter was largely due to her one and only innate ability. Namely, her paranormal ability, known as "avoiding all obstacles only by luck."

Once, she had guessed correctly a password with a probability of 1 in 10 trillion just from her intuition^[18], and another time she had crossed minefields over by skipping without even noticing where she was.

Some time ago, due to a rare blunder by Alice, she had been caught along with Dorothy by a criminal organization, and they got tied up and locked in a small room with a time bomb. Quickly escaping from the ropes, everything was fine until she started dismantling the bomb; in the end it became clear she had to cut either the red or the blue cord or else it'd explode, and she decided she'd leave the rest to Dorothy's luck.

Only ten seconds were left. Dorothy grabbed the red cord without hesitation, and overenthusiastically cut both cords. At that moment, Alice peed her pants. But the bomb was a dud... Before Dorothy's ability, impossible to analyze, that disregarded probability theory like that, Alice could only take off her hat.

Because of this ability, how many times had Dorothy beaten her to treasures by now? The good news was, since Dorothy herself didn't have much of a skill to search for things, Alice had the chance for a turn-around.

"No way, I never expected her ability of avoiding obstacles extended even to the guards."

Her nickname of "Good Luck Fairy" wasn't for show. At the same time Dorothy

tried to enter the museum, the guards were switched by chance, and accidentally she had gone through another passage, so she'd be able to approach her destination unobserved. Neither an in-depth investigation to find out how to break through, nor prudent behavior, were a match for Dorothy's infiltration as if walking into a convenience store.

"Good grief."

Muttering with a sigh, Alice rechecked her own equipment. Of course she had the Angra Mainyu and the Aeshma, and she had also brought her whip. The inertia control system worked without a hitch, too. Taking into account she'd need bullets to take on a large amount of people, she had picked ones with more emphasis on shock and impact rather than penetration power. They were better suited at neutralizing a group than at killing one person. While she didn't intend to sit by while Dorothy brought back the treasure, there was no time to overcomplicate things.

"I don't have a choice. At least in theory, I go this way, right?"

Picking up a lock of her hair, Alice gazed at the front. Maybe out of concern for the terrorism nowadays, a sturdy buffer post had been installed before the front gate. Two fully equipped guards were on both sides of the gate. Speaking of the flanks, they were firmly surrounded by high walls, with a height of about 3 meters. If it was just this, Alice would easily be able to run up the wall with her physical ability. However, a laser sensor seemed to have been set up around the upper part of the wall. If one climbed over carelessly, guards would appear in the blink of an eye.

"After all, I'll need a diversion here."

Alice decided on a strategy, and the moment she took a step, she heard music out of nowhere. It sounded like a harp.

"I wonder if someone's practicing?"

But, there were no signs of life in the apartment buildings. The wings of her hair ornaments suddenly began vibrating.

"Kuranes?"

From the reaction of the two magic creatures attached to her head as hair

ornaments, Alice strengthened her vigilance. The music she was hearing disappeared along with that subtle vibration. In order to protect her host Alice, the two magic creatures automatically eliminated that which they considered harmful to her. For the two creatures to have cancelled out the music, it could only mean there was some dangerous component included in it.

At the very instant Alice felt an unpleasant hunch and returned her gaze to the museum area, woosh, a sound flew by her ear, tearing the air.

"Wwhah!?"

Crouching in an instant, several bullets directed at her missed and hit the concrete wall, making a dull, metallic sound.

"What, with no warning, aren't you a bit awful!?"

Before confirming the enemies shooting at the same time, Alice began running towards the front gate. In a beeline, there were around 30 meters. If she put her mind to it, that was a distance she could cover in no time.

Guards appeared from the front gate, one after another. A quick estimation would have been like 30 people.

"No way! Why so many!?"

As they quickly spread left and right, they formed two lines of fire in a moment. The front row lined up their shields, and standing on one knee, aligned their gun muzzles against them; the back row also set up their sub-machineguns against those shields, in a position standing above them. It was a routine they had practiced well.

"Say what you like, but isn't this overkill!?"

That was too exaggerated to take on a single girl. Were they serious or not? She couldn't read the guards' expression over the visor of their full-faced ballistic resistant helmets. But looking at the fingers resting in the triggers, Alice clearly saw a motion appearing in their strained muscles.

"So you are serious."

The gunshots over innumerable suppressors overlapped Alice's mutterings. Several hundred shots were fired at the girl wearing a skimpy outfit.

At the roof of the solid red brick building, a little red-haired girl was dancing a few steps, watching the movement of the guards under her, that kept coming out from inside the building and gathering one after another at the front gate and around it.

Despite the still air, her skirt opened as if fluttering in the wind, and music started sounding from around her waist, though she had no musical instruments.

"Lu~lu~lululu~\\"

As she hummed to herself, the little red-haired girl extended her finger towards the view.

"As expected from Daddy, he did foresee a nuisance coming~"

Snap, with a snap of her fingers, the guards pointed their muzzle at Alice.

"Go and fight, my servants, defeat the nuisance"!"

Whirl, turning on her heels, she jumped into the skylight's window. Below, there was a warehouse where innumerable wooden boxes had been arranged.

"Nyufufuh. While the nuisance is pinned down, I should get the treasure."

Alice clearly saw the bullets coming at her. Not good. Whatever the circumstances may be, there was no way she could dodge such a barrage of bullets by herself. Even with her inertial control system, she couldn't stop an oncoming bullet. In that case, only one thing to do!

"Boost On!"

In response to Alice's will, her bodily functions were increased in one go. The movement of the looming bullets slowed down, and the hustle and bustle around her also faded away into the distance. Alice knocked down only the bullets she couldn't avoid with the daggers of her Angra Mainyu and Aeshma, and leapt into the air.

The shape of Alice jumping up was reflected in the guards' visors. But the one reflected there wasn't the same girl they had been pointing their muzzles at a moment ago. It was the figure of a goddess with abundant breasts, a toned waist, and slender, beautiful legs that extended from her round hips.

Drawing out the limits of the human potential, a scary super-technology that transformed the body itself. That was the Boost. Based on the transformation ability of the therianthropes^[19], Alice devised this special move using her own body.

The guards who witnessed the girl's transformation were momentarily stunned.

"I'll make you regret pointing your guns at me!"

Alice landed and charged at the guards without hesitation.

"Here I go, buddies!"

She pulled the triggers of both pistols as she spoke. Two flashes of light came out along with the gunshots. The full-face covered men, dazzled by the lights, stopped their movements and prepared their shields. Not minding it a bit, Alice kicked up a shield and jumped into the air.

The guards with sub-machine guns that avoided the flash fired off a volley against the airborne Alice. Though their PP-91 KEDR SMG, with their high rate of fire, seemed to spit a veritable rain of bullets, she laughed scornfully while wriggling her body as if dancing, and avoided them unceremoniously. Making full use of her inertial control system, even changing her body's trajectory airborne was easy. The only ones able to capture Alice in her Boost state were those who had similar reflexes and physical ability as her.

"You guys aren't quite enough!"

While Alice's body floated in the air, she pushed out her guns and grabbed them in both hands. The guards simultaneously prepared their shields. It was a quick response. An ordinary intruder would be swept away one-sidedly, and it'd be the end for them. But, the girl they were dealing with was nothing like ordinary.

[&]quot;I just want you to leave me alone."

Fired by the two guns, the shock of four shots to the left and right vibrated through the airspace: "Shock Wave Bullet."

Things like shields were useless, being exposed to a direct hit from the shock wave would put a human's semicircular canal out of order; the guards rolled up their eyes and collapsed. Alice landed on her feet, the guards now neutralized. Since she started the Boost, she had needed five seconds.

"Well, I guess this'll do."

As she was muttering, her line of sight turned to the unit medal attached to the guards' right shoulders. A large "A" was written there. She didn't know, but that was the most elite of Russia's Special Forces, the emblem of the alpha troops feared with the nickname of "heavy faces."

"Tsk."

Alice clicked her tongue when she heard footsteps approaching. Just how many guards were going to come? There'd be no end to them if she dealt with them separately. Her goal wasn't to fight them, but to get the treasure.

"Well then, I can do a pretty good diversion for Dorothy."

Alice put the two guns in their holsters, and grabbed her whip. If she was going to deal with a large number of people, she should use the weapon with unlimited ammo. Besides, since her opponents used guns, when it came to reach, the whip's was better than the dagger's.

"Why, I wonder when I got so dumb."

Alice gave a sigh. Nevertheless, getting the treasure without pulling the trigger once was quite stylish.

At the time Alice was battling the soldiers, Dorothy was humming; she had arrived to the warehouse that was their goal.

"Fufufunfunfu~n√"

Just to be on the safe side, she was wearing the guards' uniform that she had

found in the locker rooms on her way. Still, the size was too large, it totally looked more like a costume. All the same, she hadn't been questioned or even seen once by the guards all the way there. Hers was a skill that blessed her with formidable luck.

Innumerable wooden boxes were in front of her now, piled up and fully loaded with treasures.

"E~rr..."

Her ability may have been demonstrated during the invasion, but it was utterly useless at looking for things.

Various articles had been squeezed in there without any organization whatsoever. Maybe in the middle of being moved with a forklift, wooden boxes had been stacked up in 2 to 3 layers while mounted on a pallet, and reached as high as twice her height. Out of the mountain of wooden boxes totally jumbled as if in a maze, Dorothy approached the nearby box. She scanned the Russian labels with the device in her arm to try and translate their contents.

A. Hitler's skull, Nikolay II's diary, General Secretary Brezhnev's wig, Tolstoy's autographed manuscript, Lenin's Mausoleum's initial blueprint, Alexander Korolev's works, pieces of the rocket engine...

"Oh, it's just random stuff here."

Maybe the collections in this warehouse had been increasing every time trouble happened from the early period of the Soviet Union's revolution until its collapse?

In this warehouse that lacked any administrator, all sorts of things were left there, neglected. Though it'd be a gold mine were any connoisseur to sort through it, for someone like Dorothy who disregarded anything other than her goal, it was just a pile of junk.

"Or better yet, should I burn it all away?"

Muttering something dangerous, Dorothy proceeded through the maze of wooden boxes.

Whoosh!

Surprised by a sudden gust of wind, Dorothy hurried to hide behind a box, and listened carefully. There were signs of something moving. She hushed her breath, and timidly peeked to see what was going on. There was a little redheaded girl in there.

"If the information from Daddy Long Legs is certain, it should be around heeere~"[20]

A lisping, sweet tone. And yet, she projected her voice just fine.

"Aah", this isn't it eitheer"

Whenever she shook her skirt, the boxes around her were pulverized and the products came out rolling, as if a tornado was taking place. It was quite rough.

Won't the things inside there get damaged with that? Dorothy frowned on the girl's violent acts, forgetting that up until just a while ago she herself had intended to burn them. Though, she wasn't touching the boxes, so how come they were getting crushed? Dorothy tried to look into it for more details, when she noticed something.

There was no sound. Usually, when a box was crushed so flashily, it should make a big crushing sound. But, as if watching a video being edited before turning on the sound effects, only the crushing sounds were missing.

"Uh, I wonder if it's some magic trick?"

Dorothy took out her portable scope from her pouch.

"Err, the mode is..."

That scope, that at a glance looked just like opera glasses, was a gadget that allowed to switch between 3 possible modes; it could not only show ordinary visible light, but also infrared and acoustic reactions. The problem was, Dorothy wasn't that good at using it, and couldn't make anything out.

The little red-haired girl also noticed Dorothy's groans and headed towards the box's shade.

"Who is iit?"

"Ri~ght, please wait a moment."

After Dorothy replied dutifully, she realized she had been found out, and hid herself again.

"Err..."

But, come to think about it, there was no need to hide this late in the game.

"Ah, who are you!?"

So she did a 180, stood up and pointed her finger with a *snap*, scowling at the girl with a pale face. *Grin*, the red-haired girl smiled, and lo! Her body rose into the sky.

Levitation? What kind of gimmick was that? Dorothy focused on the girl's appearance. As if they were her stage clothes, a flair skirt and a halter dress that widely exposed her shoulders and back. No matter where you looked on her body, there was nothing like wires or machinery that let her rise into the sky. Then, her floating in the air was due to some sort of supernatural power?



The girl took her mic-like stick with her right hand, put it to her lips and introduced herself as if singing:

"My name is Lynn. I'm Lord Irukinuf's Songstress."

"For the sake of Lord Irukinuf, I came to take the Salzburg Cube heere. Those who bother me, I'll slaa ughteer, slaughteer."

As she made her dangerous declaration, Lynn glared at Dorothy below with her golden eyes.

"So, if you don't want to be slaughtered, please turn tail and leaave~"

"Phew..."

Alice had managed to neutralize the guards, save for one person. In order to gather information, she grabbed the guard she hadn't stunned by the nape of his neck and lifted him. A display of power characteristic of the Boost state.

"What's your affiliation? Mr. Ivan."

"If you don't get it just by looking, it's useless to answer, you she-devil." [21]

"Oh, I thought superstition vanished in the era of socialism?"

"Religion and history are not the same."

The guard replied to Alice's question while groaning. He was unexpectedly tough. Alice looked at his rank insignia and understood the reason. Three stars in a line. She didn't know the details, but he was definitely an officer.

"This was my blunder. It'd have been better with a grunt."

For someone in leader class, he'd never cough it up so easily. She couldn't afford to take time for an interrogation.

"You bitch, what's your goal? Did you come for our country's treasure? It's a fool's errand, there's just a pile of crap here."

"Too bad for you, I have some business with that crap."

Alice lightly twisted the guard's nape of the neck.

"Fuck you, you old fart witch..."

The guard fainted before he could finish speaking.

She had wasted her time. Leaving the guards before the front gate, she turned towards the entrance, that was wide open.

"Anyway you slice it, I'll get ambushed from either side of the door."

Alice veered off the front door without hesitation, and ran up the red brick's outer wall. Since she was adding the inertial control system to her physical ability enhanced by the Boost, a height of ten meters didn't even register to her.

She reached the roof in a moment, and went at full speed right above the warehouse. Rather than wandering inside the museum, it'd be faster if she broke the ceiling right above and jumped off.

"Hn? It's open?"

One of the skylights was carelessly open. It was located just by the warehouse. Maybe someone had gone first besides Dorothy? Thinking that, she peered inside from the skylight.

"...Who?"

She could see Dorothy wearing the oversized uniform of the guards, facing an unknown red-haired girl.

"It's quite the unusual opponent."

The red-haired girl was advancing while airborne, destroying wooden boxes left and right as she passed them, without even touching them. Her body itself was barely moving. Alice considered if the mic-like stick in her hand was some kind of acoustic weapon, but it didn't seem the case. If she had some kind of supernatural ability, that was going to be a troublesome opponent. Even in her Boost state, she wouldn't stand much of a chance if her opponent had psychic abilities. Although she might not be able to win this one, she should be prepared for an uphill battle.

"Kuranes, lend me your strength."

Along with her brief muttering, Alice changed her goggles' view to acoustic reaction mode, and Kuranes' wings vibrated. The world reflected before her eyes

changed completely. When she saw the shape of the girl facing Dorothy, she held her breath. The girl wasn't floating in the air. Transparent tentacles reminiscent of an octopus or a squid extended from her waist area, as if lifting her own body.

"So she wasn't human."

Kuranes had made the same reaction as when she heard the harp-like tone a while ago. Was that tone this girl's handiwork, too? In any case, even if she could destroy boxes with tentacles turned transparent, it was no big deal now that Alice understood the secret behind the illusion.

Alice gave a sigh of relief, and a smile appeared on her lips.

"Well, I wonder at what timing should I jump in."

Reading her thoughts, Kuranes collected the sound under her.

"Lord Irukinuf's Songstress?"

Dorothy was looking up at the slowly floating red-haired girl, and noticing the other Treasure Hunter at the skylight, she was going to wave at her, so Alice hid herself right away. That mudhead, she wouldn't be able to surprise anybody if she was found out!

"For Lord Irukinuf's sake, I came to take the Salzburg Cube housed in heere~"

Laughing with a *nyufufu*, the red-haired girl destroyed the boxes around her. Thanks to the acoustic reaction, Alice could clearly see each one of the fragments. But, oddly enough, no breaking sound that could interfere with the acoustic reaction was occurring at all. Instead, it was the surface of the tentacles that extended from the girl's waist that caused a microscopic vibration.

So that was it. Was that why they made no sound in particular? Due to that, she could hear the conversation with Dorothy clearly, too.

Alice prepared a stance to be able to charge at a moment's notice, and placed her foot on the skylight's edge. The height was less than 10 meters. If she was in the Boost state, it'd be a simple jump even without the inertial control system. Under her, the tentacles were blowing up heavy dust by destroying the wooden boxes.

Seeing the objects which came out, Alice leaned forward involuntarily. Dorothy seemed to have noticed as well. At first glance, one looked just like a lump of coal. But Alice didn't miss the name in the tag attached to the mass of rock, "Salzburg Cube."

Unexpectedly, Dorothy reacted first:

"That's mine!"

She claimed, pulling the trigger of her wire gun in a hurry. The Catcher Head shot by high-pressure compressed air flew towards the rock mass at breakneck speed. That Catcher Head automatically recognized the target, and included a homing function to correct its orbit. It was said that anyone who pulled the trigger would hit the bull's-eye, that was the helpful item Dorothy was proficient with.

"Thi~ink agaiin! Lynn will get thaat~"

The tentacles moved along with her sweet voice, deflecting the trajectory of the Catcher Head.

"H-How did you do that!?"

Dorothy raised her voice in surprise seeing the Catcher Head, the pride of the Baum Foundation, having been flipped in the air. She couldn't see Lynn's invisible tentacles. Thus, she didn't know either the trick behind the rock mass floating in the air.

"Nyufufuu~n, this is Lord Irukinuf's blessiing~"

Smiling, Lynn reached out to the rock mass she had caught with her tentacle.

"That's as far as you get!"

Now was her chance, and Alice flung herself from the skylight. Extending her toe nimbly, she kicked the mass of rock off Lynn's tentacle.

"Oh myy?"

Lynn tilted her neck. Her hand had grabbed empty air.

Making a heavy sound like *Slamm!*, the rock lump rolled down the tile floor.

"Too bad. Guess I'll help myself to it!"

Alice landed between Dorothy and Lynn, and reached out to the rock mass lying around on the floor.

"Kiiih", damn those Alpha Special Forces guys, they couldn't keep you busyy"!"

Lynn swung her arm down in frustration, and twisting her waist, extended her tentacles towards the rock lump.

"Nuh-uh, that belongs to Dolly!"

Earlier than Alice's hand or Lynn's tentacle, the second Catcher Head Dorothy shot approached the rock lump.

What could move the fastest under these circumstances was Alice in her Boost state. Her reaction speed exceeded the Catcher Head's muzzle velocity, and once overtaking it, she grabbed the rock mass before Lynn's tentacle!

"Treasure secured-!! Eh, what?"

The rock lump containing Salzburg's Cube began to crumble and fall apart in her hands.

"Ah~, it broke! Allie, you broke iit!"

"Did not! It was already broken!"

Screaming at Dorothy, Alice picked up a black cuboid from inside the quickly collapsing rock mass.

"Eh?"

The moment Alice squeezed it, a light glow ran in ripples on the Salzburg Cube's surface.

"Yahoo, the real deaal!"

Lynn saw that shine and raised her voice in joy, as a jet black cube fell down from her skirt along with her surprise.

"Wwha!?"

The cube Lynn dropped looked exactly the same as the one in Alice's hands.

"No way, that one's a fake!?"

Alice was surprised as to how Lynn's blunder had made her practically admit she intended to replace it with a fake. But her surprises didn't end there. Her body rapidly began shrinking, even if it was still too early for the Boost's time limit.

"A-Aah... don't, I said don't...!"

The special solution that protected her body while in Boost gathered in one point of her body after the reduction.

"Oh shit... Not now..."

Feeling as if she couldn't hold her need to pee, Alice's cheeks turned bright red in an instant. And Lynn wasn't that easy-going as to miss that her opponent had begun to tremble.

"I don't caare, give it to Lyynn!"

A tentacle that gave off a heavy wind blew Alice away, and caught the cube with the shining light. Her small-sized body danced in the air as she sprinkled a golden liquid.

"Allie!!"

Dorothy ran to the landing point and caught the girl sent flying in midair, both of them falling together. Then, she glared really angrily at the airborne Lynn.

"Even Lynn should be qualified now to open up the "Gaate"!"

She smiled with a grin, and began rising as if sucked into the skylight.

"Nyufufufuh, with this, it's mission compleete!"

"Wait!"

Dorothy shouted at Lynn, training her wire gun at her. The Catcher Head was charged with a high-voltage stun gun now. If she hit her directly, she'd surely turn the tables.

"I won't waiit~! Because I have to hurry up and take this to Lord Irukinuuf~!"

Lynn's skirt fluttered, and a small tornado went wild through the warehouse. If they got hit with the debris from the boxes accelerated by the gusts of wind, they wouldn't leave in one piece. "W-What is, this force...!?"

In an attempt to shield herself, Dorothy reached for a nearby wooden board. So, going on the offensive was out of the question.

"Dorothy... take a look at the acoustic reflection mode..."

Following the instructions from Alice still in her arms, she switched her opera glasses into acoustic reaction mode. Now she could see what she couldn't before. Lynn had octopus-like tentacles growing from her waist, which held her body and lifted it in the air.

"It's easy if you know the trick."

Fighting against her post-Boost exhaustion, Alice's gaze followed Lynn's figure as she made her big escape. Though it'd be nice if she could shoot at her in pursuit once, even as a get-well gift, she was in no condition to shoot a gun now.

Irukinuf.

Gate.

Invisible tentacles.

Getting up from Dorothy's arms, Alice picked up the cube Lynn had dropped. For a fake OOPArt, it was too elaborate. So there were people like her behind the scenes, secretly substituting OOPArts, after all?

"Say, Dorothy."

She didn't get a reply.

"Since it seems we could have a common enemy, why don't you partner up with me for a while?"

Dorothy still didn't answer. However, her shoulders were trembling.

"What's wrong?"

Turning her eyes to Dorothy, she understood: her clothes were dripping wet. When she caught Alice, she got exposed to the protective solution she had spilled.

The blonde girl looked at her with a troubled expression.

"A-Allie peed her pants-!"

She accused her in a loud voice, as if bursting into tears.

"Why-!! Don't I always say it's not pee!?"

"But, but, it's yellow, slimy-, and it's at body warmth-"

"I said it's not!"

Alice pouted with a red-hot face.

"If you still doubt it, do as many ingredient analyses in the Twister as you wish!"

As a result of lifting the Boost, the protective solution supplemented with the Boost had nowhere to go when the body area was reduced, and though it only spilled beyond the tension limit, with Dorothy calling it "pee", "pee", all the time, somehow it ended up making her feel like she had seriously peed herself.

"Eeh", but, with Allie and her habit of peeing..."

"Don't bring up mistakes from over a decade ago! So, how about it, will you join me or not!?" [22]

In response to Alice's question, that was more like a threat, Dorothy made a peace sign in agreement.

This text is a machine translation (MTL).

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.



This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

Chapter 2: Reliable Partner?

Dodgson Foundation Headquarters, 1:00 a.m., late at night at the mansion. Alice came out of a limousine from the Baum's house that was tasked with escorting her after the fight in Moscow had ended.

"Welcome home, Professor."

Welcoming Alice as she returned home, there was a woman in black with a hat over her eyes: Hatter.

"I'm back. It took more time than expected, I ended up coming past midnight."

Alice took her coat off as she went from the entrance to the stairs. Hatter grabbed it right away, folding it so that it wouldn't get wrinkled.

As an artificial life form created on the basis of the Lost Technology Alice's mother had discovered, she didn't require sleep. When she wasn't running the Vimana, her main duty was managing the mansion, taking advantage of her skills. If March Hare, who also acted as onsite support for Alice, was her chauffeur, Hatter's role was more of a female butler's.

"How was Moscow?"

Hatter asked as if greeting her normally, tucking Alice's now folded jacket under her arm.

"Not good, as you can see, it ended in a miss. Neither Dorothy nor I were able to obtain the treasure."

When her mother created Hatter, what she had required from her were her information-gathering abilities and her analytical skills. To accumulate vast amounts of information, and when asked a question by her mistress, to sort and retrieve the available information with a defined judgment to provide an answer. She was said to be quite accurate, with a better performance, higher speed and higher capacity than a supercomputer.

Since she would have checked too the video information relayed from Alice's goggles, naturally Hatter knew what had happened in Moscow. But, she wouldn't utter an opinion about it on her own. Unlike human beings, artificial life forms didn't take voluntary action. If their master didn't ask them, they wouldn't act on their will themselves. That was engraved in their behavior principles, as a safety device to prevent rebellion and defiance. In that respect, they were harmless beings, that one could even call tools.

"You withdrew with no results, then."

"We got results. Such as the performance of the Twister from the Baum house."

If it was the data from the one and only aircraft in the world that boasted of the same performance as the Vimana, Hatter would agree too. Since the information barriers of the Baum family were one of the sanctuaries that Hatter couldn't break through.

"That's good."

Oh? What a weak reaction.

Alice looked slightly doubtful.

"By any chance... do you already have it?"

"Yes. By the Bharat Agreement that Lady Lewis concluded with the predecessor of the Baum family, we exchange the data of the Vimana and the Twister for mutual safekeeping."

Even if she knew, she wouldn't tell her any further unless she asked. It was at times like these that Alice realized that both Hatter and March Hare were just tools, artificial life forms her mother had left her.

"Bharat Agreement, you say?"

"The Dodgson Foundation's Vimana, the Baum house's Twister; both are machines that hide unique abilities from the world. So as to not crush each other and lose it all, both families swore to exchange information and not to fight each other except in treasure hunts."

[&]quot;I see."

Alice understood it perfectly. The moment she completely held the real power of the Foundation at least, she could work and try to secure the products of the Lost Technology the Baum house owned. Aside from her childhood friend, Dorothy the mudhead, a lot of excellent staff awaited in the Baum house.

They would be thinking the same. And with her mother, the family head, missing, right now was the perfect opportunity if they wanted to begun various approaches to that effect, including an economic offensive, against the temporarily weakened Dodgson Foundation.

Despite the situation, there were no signs of anything like that. In fact, when it came to Dorothy, it was more like she even proudly presented the advanced tools she had developed herself. So Hatter meant it was all because of some common front system that Alice didn't even know herself.

"I kinda feel like I'm the only one out of the loop."

Alice pouted a little, expressing her dissatisfaction in a childlike manner.

"That's because you didn't ask, Professor."

As long as there was no one to turn its pages, a dictionary was only paper. Hatter's knowledge and information was the same. Alice gave a sigh, and looked up at Hatter's face.

"Then, there's something I want you to investigate for a bit."

"Ask away."

"About a Gate, Irukinuf, and guys who use invisible tentacles."

"Gate... that information could lead to Lady Lewis."

Hearing her mother's name coming out from Hatter's mouth surprised Alice considerably.

"Is that related to Mom's whereabouts?"

"Yes."

"Then, I can investigate it even without the Foundation's permission?"

"Of course. If it's something about the Gate, you don't need the permission of the 3 Queens."

Since the moment Lewis, the Foundation's representative, had gone missing, the Foundation was under the management of guardians called the 3 Queens. Alice only interacted with them through electronic documents. Therefore, the identity of the 3 Queens remained unknown, not to mention their ages and appearances, or even their sex.

Once, she had tried to have Hatter investigate it, but with Lewis having given Hatter orders not to investigate it, the homunculus had obstinately refused. When she tried to force her further, Hatter put up such a strong protection she thought she'd lose her mind, so Alice hadn't undergone any more action in relation to the 3 Queens' identities after that.

"That is to say, you know about the Gate."

"Yes."

Hatter nodded. Alice looked at her watch. About fifteen minutes past one o'clock. She should go to sleep considering she was to go to school the next day, yet despite that, she didn't think she'd sleep a wink with this situation anyways.

"Tell me, Hatter. About Mom's involvement with the Gate."

"Then let's visit the underground storage room."

Hatter gave the jacket she was holding back to Alice. It got chilly underground. She'd need her jacket.

"If you're in front of the actual thing, you'll understand it faster."

The underground storage room of the Dodgson Foundation. Its gross area was ten times the mansion portion's, only below ground. Not only was it there where they developed various mechanics including the Vimana, but also had an arrival and departure facility, manufactured tools and various items required for explorations there, and it was fully equipped with experiment facilities. If the secret base that existed in the South Pacific was a hangar, this place could easily be called the command center.

At the bottom layer of the mansion, there were many inheritances that kept

being collected without being exposed to the world. As she was guided by Hatter, the woman with a silk hat over her eyes, Alice arrived at the 66th storeroom.

"Here is where we store the relic that became the basis of Lady Lewis's conviction of the Gate's existence."

Hatter held up her hand, and released the seal on the storeroom. She also served as a master key herself.

The door opened with a quiet drive sound, and light entered the pitch black room.

"This way."

Still guided by Hatter, Alice set foot in the 66th store. In the center of a room ten meters high per ten meters wide, with a size of about one hundred square meters, the statue of a goddess tightly grasping a sword stood alone.

"Is this it?"

Alice looked puzzled. Though it was a fine modeling abreast of the ancient Greek sculpture style, it wasn't particularly eye-catching.

"This stone statue is what proved the Gate's existence for Lady Lewis."

Hatter removed the mounted pad displaying information from the wall, and handed it to Alice. The information presented on the pad's LCD screen made Alice's temple twitch. While the composition data just showed plain marble, the test results suggested that this same marble didn't exist anywhere on this earth.

"So it's a marble that only exists here alone in the whole world."

"Yes, an impossible craft, i.e. an OOPArt."

"But, how is this connected to the Gate? What's the Gate in the first place?"

"The Gate is what connects the multiple worlds. You must be familiar with the Many-Worlds Interpretation." [23]

There isn't just one world. Multiple worlds exist at the same time. Each world is slightly different than the others, and they increase infinitely if you stop to count them. For example, there's a theory that says the worlds diverge even for

a case like if you eat breakfast or not.

"Isn't that a theory only good enough for a Sci-Fi movie's plot?"

"But, it's true."

Hatter made a pause, and turned towards the statue.

"Where do you think this statue came from?"

"Aren't we still digging out things yet undiscovered?"

Hatter shook her head in silence.

"It's from somewhere outside our planet, no, our world."

Alice frowned hearing Hatter's words.

"...Are you serious?"

"Let me show you in an orderly sequence."

When Hatter held up her hand, the floor slid and a small case rose.

"Artifact number QB001, Crystal Sword."

Alice looked at the crystal ball enshrined in the case. The figure of a woman holding a sword flickered inside it.



"What's with this?"

"This is the moment it was discovered, to the south of Iraq's Euphrates ravine. The ruins were dated as 800,000 years old."

"A heritage from the prehistoric civilization."

"Yes. And it still survived up to these days."

Hatter snapped her fingers. The illumination of the storeroom slowly darkened, and the case housing the crystal ball lowered down into the floor, which became plane again. A bright light was cast from the 4 corners of the room at the same time, forming a three-dimensional image in the center.

"Mom!?"

The picture that emerged showed the shape of Lewis, Alice's mother. The Lewis in the video was saying something while holding the crystal ball.

"Is there no sound!?"

"Unfortunately, nothing of the sound remains. But, I can analyze a few of the words by the movement of the lips. Do you want me to display subtitles?"

"Do it!"

The letters "acknowledged" were superimposed over Lewis' image matching the motion of her lips. As soon as the letters disappeared, a circular shape appeared, shining light around Lewis' body.

Was that projected from the crystal ball? That didn't seem to be the case. It had emerged from the ground. That circle rotated slowly for a while, then disappeared.

Then, the circular shape appeared at a spot about 3 meters away from Lewis. Not only that, but a stone statue rose from below that circle. It was the same stone statue that was right beside Alice.

Rather than having been buried underground and coming out after displacing the soil, the stone statue showed up in front in Lewis as if having passed through the circular shape.

"Nothing existed underneath there. In the prior underground radar

explorations, it was reported that no ruins had been detected whatsoever."

Alice didn't need to wait for Hatter's words to understand. The stone statue hadn't come from underground. It had come from another world, somewhere beyond the circle.

The image disappeared abruptly, plunging the room into darkness.

"Lady Lewis realized that the Gate from this circular formation was a portal to another dimension."

With Hatter's words, the clubroom became bright.

"After that, Lady Lewis was eager to journey into the unknown beyond the gate, and we repeated the experiment to open the Gate over and over again. Various technologies, such as us artificial life forms, or the magic creatures that serve as your hair ornaments, Professor, were obtained from there. But that wasn't what Lady Lewis desired. What she wanted was to get to cross over the portal herself." [24]

"And Mom crossed the Gate in the end?"

"The odds are high."

"Then why are you showing me this image now?"

Hatter should have shown me earlier, right after Mom went missing!

Even if the situation wouldn't have changed with her being told, Alice became quite emotional.

On the other hand, she could rationally understand the circumstances at the time. Hatter couldn't act on her own will, and the 3 Queens had their hands full with the management of the Foundation, too. They probably couldn't afford to pay attention to a little girl.

"Those were Lady Lewis' instructions. Only when you noticed the existence of the Gate on your own and sought an answer, was I to tell you, Professor."

"Mom's?"

If they were her Mom's instructions, it couldn't be helped, since Hatter was just following them faithfully. It would be wrong to lash out at her.

"With that said, this is a photograph of the ruins Lady Lewis was investigating before she went missing."

A picture was projected on the wall. Standing in the center of a stone circle in the shape of a ring, Lewis appeared shaking hands with an elderly, whitebearded gentleman in a wheelchair.

"Where is this?"

"The Northern Scotland Highlands. That's a megalithic structure that came out from the bottom of a glacial lake that collapsed due to global warming."

And of course, Alice was also curious about the elderly gentleman in a wheelchair.

"And who is it? This person here."

Hard as she tried to remember the faces of her mother's friends and acquaintances, she couldn't recall ever seeing that face.

"Swodar Nyarmain. The first discoverer of the Highlands' megalithic structure."

"Is he still alive?"

"He went missing, much like Lady Lewis."

"Who or where is he from? That alleged Swodar."

"We know nothing of him. His nationality, whereabouts, even his past history are unknown."

"Unknown, huh."

For Hatter herself to say those were unknown, it probably meant there were no records of him anywhere on the face of the Earth.

"And, how did the investigation turn out?"

Alice asked to change the mood.

"Immediately after Lady Lewis went missing, we did an investigation on the Highland's megalithic structures in collaboration with the Baum house, but there was nothing left."

"Nothing?"

"Let alone biological traces of Lady Lewis, the megaliths reflected in the picture had disappeared too."

The picture projected on the wall surface changed. It now showed how the land had been cut in a circle, just as if someone had scooped out the ice's surface with a spoon.

As she heard Hatter's emotionless voice, Alice fully understood why her Mom had been hiding the Gate's existence: it was too dangerous.

There were no problems in the case of the Vimana and the Twister. The same went for the artificial life forms, the magic creatures, etc; they were only tools. Without anyone to use them, they were meaningless, worthless.

On the other hand, the Gate had infinite potential. Being able to come from and go to the innumerable existing worlds, one could even bring back something lost in this world from other worlds. Used well, it might also be possible to make mankind progress in innovative ways. But, it could destroy the world if someone ambitious got their hands on it.

Therefore, its existence had to be kept secret. To that end, only few people should get to know. Even for relatives, it must be kept hidden from those who didn't deserve to know. Lewis had judged it so.

"Say, Hatter. Display the list of the treasures related to the Gate Mom had been searching."

"Understood."

Upon Alice's request, Hatter moved her fingertip, and the wall surface reflected a list. When she saw the list, a smile formed in her lips.

"So I see."

For Alice to take action as a Treasure Hunter, the projects which the 3 Queens had given unconditional permission to use the whole equipment for overlapped beautifully with those related with the Gate. The 3 Queens might as well be telling Alice: "Go chase after your mother."

"Hatter, investigate about a child named Lynn who can use invisible tentacles,

and about Irukinuf. After all, it seems those guys are aiming at the Gate too, somehow."

"Understood, Professor."

Hatter bowed lightly hearing Alice's words.

Location: the aircraft Twister owned by the Baum family. Inside the vast area of the Baum family, most of its airframe, with the shape of an inverted cone, sank into the ground like a top stepped on from above. If any stranger saw it, it'd look like a peculiar detached building to them.

Even though soon it'd be about time the sky began to dawn, a number of staff were still working on it. Inside the control room, a large yet slender woman, who spared no time working there even after returning from Moscow, had just finished working at last.

"I see, so it was like this?"

The woman looked at the analysis on the screen and made a comment that sounded satisfactory as she printed it out. What she was analyzing was the replica of the Salzburg Cube that the enemy Dorothy encountered in Moscow had dropped.

"Milady. After all, it's likely that Irukinuf is secretly substituting OOPArts."

Her eyes turned to the young girl she had a report to give to. Her dear Milady had collapsed with an unladylike pose on the sofa. Though she wanted to put her to bed as she was, she couldn't afford to. She picked up a bunch of her Milady's golden hairs, and began tickling her nose.

"Feh, feh... atchooie! Shoot, what a fright!" [25]

Startled by her own sneezing, her Milady awakened.

"I apologize if you're tired. The results came out."

"Ah, thank you very much, Scarecrow. Did you find something out?"

"Yes. Here."

The large woman called Scarecrow handed her Milady a printout. Though they might be handling electronic data, handing the reports of her findings on paper was actually more tasteful.

"Oh, as expected from you. I'll be able to sleep soundly with this."

Her Milady, aka Dorothy, smiled while stifling a yawn.

"That sounds fine enough."

"You rest as well, Scarecrow. Good job-."

"Yes. Excuse me then."

Scarecrow bowed deeply, and headed to her bedroom with steps that seemed like she'd fall down at any moment.

Alice parted from Hatter and returned to her room. The hands of the clock marked 4:00 am. Since today was a weekday and she had school, she had to get up at 7:00. Doing a one-day trip Moscow on a weekday, she sure was reckless.

It was quite hard to go back and forth from the routine to the extraordinary. Rather, should she take a day off? As she pondered about it, Alice fell down on the bed. With that prolonged whirlwind tour, even the well-trained Alice was like this; there was no way Dorothy and her average stamina could endure as much.

First of all, now was the time to scrutinize the information. The Gate her mother chased. An Irukinuf involved with that Gate. A non-human child claiming to be Irukinuf's Songstress. So many, many mysteries to investigate.

"YaaaAaaawn~~~~"

Just when she turned off the light, about to surrender herself to the sleepiness, Alice's gaze turned to her desk. She had killed the lighting but the room was still dim. Following the source of light, she found out that her computer monitor was shining brightly.

Seems like she had gotten an e-mail. Though she could as well have read it in the morning, she couldn't bring herself to ignore it and go to sleep. Alice raised her body from the bed, and gave the order to open it towards the PC's mike. The PC, operated by speech recognition, automatically displayed the received mail on the monitor.

The sender was Dorothy. The time stamp, fifteen minutes ago.

"Isn't she tough~"

No, she isn't. Surely she hasn't even noticed she's tired herself. Because she's stupid.

Muttering to herself with a wry smile, Alice looked through the mail.

<I found out about something good. For more details, let's talk at school tomorrow.>

If it turns out to be something worthless, I guess I'll punish her a bit.

Hatter was working to gather information in a room lit by the glow of the monitors. Speaking every language, entering all the networks around the world, she could glare at the whole world from there. If she put her mind to it, she could check the actions of the President with the White House's security cameras, or she could get local information through the mobile phone of a civilian going through the town.

"...Hmm... no articles or traces of them...?"

Her search finished, she reached the conclusion that they were impossible to identify, and decided to move to the next measure: reporting that they couldn't be found. Since she couldn't obtain even a clue at this stage, future searches could also lead to a waste of effort.

Reaching that conclusion, Hatter booted up her e-mail software to send the information to the sleeping Alice.

"Oh?"

A mail had arrived, addressed to Hatter. It's title, "Introduction to the Creation Myth of Irukinuf/Arukinuf." The field of the sender read, "Red Queen."

"Why does the Red Queen have information even I couldn't obtain?"

The Book Building, after school. There were many students in the librarian's room, that was being used by the literature club as their headquarters.

"Chief, did you finally wake up?"

"Well now-"

Alice gave a dull answer to the male member's question. Indeed, there was no way she could recover her stamina by sleeping less than three hours. Although she could have used some medicines, she didn't want to use them if at all possible, as the side effects were scary. So in the end both Alice and Dorothy spent most of their classes in the arms of Morpheus. [26]

"Dorothy, you were sleeping too, what happened last night?"

"We were working on our latest plot until late."

In contrast to the gruff Alice, Dorothy answered the male staffer's question in the manner of a quite well-bred Milady.

"Anyways, since I'll be working out the details of the ending with Dorothy from now, move away and don't listen to our conversation if you want to read and enjoy the complete work."

Alice moved her hand to send the boy away. Though it was more the kind of gesture you'd use to make an animal obey you, since she did those things all the time, the staff didn't really mind.

"Dorothy, will you wake up anytime soon?"

Alice pressed lightly the tip of Dorothy's nose, who had just given a clear answer to the boy just now.

"I'm awake. How rude."

Dorothy raised her voice in protest, but her eyes became glazed the very next moment, and changed to an expression like she'd fall asleep at any time.

"The focus of your eyes doesn't seem to match that, does it?"

"Henyu"

Groggily, Dorothy fell face-first on the club room's desk.

"Just like the mudhead. Sleeping so much, and still sleepy."

The school classes had no more meaning for Alice than to maintain her attendance record. She achieved good enough results in the tests, and was certain to submit her homework every time. When it came to Dorothy though, she seemed to be struggling with every test.

In the first place, unlike Alice, who attended school in order to experience the day-to-day as the family motto, there was no reason for Dorothy to attend school. If she needed knowledge, a professional tutor could be called in through the financial power of the Baum house, and make an education curriculum for Dorothy's exclusive use. Her attending school was just due to her having the opportunity of attending the same school for the first time in many years with the Alice she was separated academically from since childhood, nothing but wanting to enjoy the student mood together.

"If you get failing marks in a test and have to hold back a year, Dorothy, I won't care at all~"

Lying like so, Alice spread her own notes in front of Dorothy's eyes.

"Eh? Allie, what's this?"

"I just put my notebooks in the table. You may look if you want to, I didn't say anything about copying them before it's too late."

Dorothy's eyes shined with surprise and joy.

"But, Allie, you were sleeping like me, how did you take these?"

"I rather keep that a secret for now."

Whenever the classes were over and it looked like there was a recess, Alice woke up, borrowed a notebook from a classmate and copied it.

As long as she took notes, that was enough to prepare for an exam. In fact, though she had pulled this stunt more for Dorothy's sake than her own, it wasn't like Alice to say such a thing.

"So, do you want them? Or not?"

"I do! I do! I need them! Thanks, Allie! You're the friend everyone should have!"

After Dorothy thanked her profusely, she immediately began copying from the notebooks.

"If you think about it, in this world with advanced computerization, I don't think it's a good idea that part of the education is still analog."

Dorothy complained with a grumble, her hands fast at work.

"I don't really dislike it. If you move your fingers, won't your body remember it better? And if you learn about classical literature series like the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey", it might be unexpectedly useful later."

"Huh?"

"You don't know?"

"What are those? If it's classical literature, wouldn't it usually be "The Count of Monte Cristo" or "Moby Dick"?"

"...Dorothy, dear gal, just how did you find the ruins of Troy?"

"I found them by digging properly!"

Only you could find it that way!

Alice had to make an effort not to retort aloud.

In contrast with the Dodgson Foundation, where treasure hunts began with a minute investigation, carefully and cautiously double-checked, in the Baum Foundation their actions consisted on bold ideas. What was important in an adventure was whether it was interesting or not. "Leave the certainly safe treasures to the common people. The luxury to enjoy uncertain danger is ours to take." That was the Code of Conduct unique to the family loved by the Good Luck Fairy.

Even Glinda, Dorothy's mother, the predecessor that gave away the seat of Treasure Hunter to Dorothy two years ago, was also said to have acquired many operable super-ancient inheritances, including the Twister, because she had seen them in a dream. The family motto of the Baum's house was "The truth is

not on a desk. It's at the actual site", giving priority to taking action, that Dorothy had taken to heart well.

"What happens, Allie?"

Dorothy's voice pulled her back to reality.

"I was just thinking of an effective retort for someone from your family.

Anyways! It doesn't hurt to take a look at the classics related to the Roman Empire, Egypt and Persia."

"But, the sites around those have been dug exhaustively. Even if we learn about those now, it won't help much, will it?"

Dorothy answered as she transcribed notes. A friend who could regard these topics not as topic trivia knowledge, but as information that could be put to practical use, was precious.

"We could obtain a clue investigating other civilizations of the same period."

The architecture technology and higher mathematics of the ancient Rome were so sophisticated they were even used nowadays. Though different theories diverged on whether that civilization had developed naturally or they had taken over a different sophisticated civilization, Treasure Hunters like Alice leaned towards the latter.

The civilizations repetition theory. It was the hypothesis that after a highly sophisticated civilization collapsed and retreated back to Paleolithic levels, after a long time it'd end up recovering. Though, it wasn't just a theory for Alice or Dorothy, who had inheritances of super-ancient civilizations in their hands...^[27]

Speaking of which, the Gate's existence Hatter told her last night, that sure was a crazy theory that could give this hypothesis a run for its money; Alice got the feeling many of her core beliefs had been shaken.

"There's also are many cases where myths or aboriginal folktales way before the written era were actually talking about the things we cover."

After that preface, Alice whispered to Dorothy, "Like your Twister, that was originally considered an Ukifune on the sky of Japan." [28]

"Ah, that was right. Since I use it normally, I had forgotten."

"I feel sorry for your attendants, having to deal with this mudhead..."

"Munyu~, if you call me a mudhead, Allie, I'll also call you a wet-girl..."

Ker-wham!

Alice didn't even let Dorothy finish her sentence. She took the hardcover she had put on the table and swung it down vertically at the crown of her head.

The eyes around the clubroom concentrated on the dull sound. Without raising her voice, Dorothy grabbed her head and fell face-first on the table.

"Don't say that in public!"

Seeing Alice's eyes full of murderous intent, Dorothy stayed silent.

"Ugh..."

"Nothing to see here!"

Alice's roar, like a drill sergeant's, made all the members divert their eyes at once.

"Aalright, that's better!"

After making sure the other members had returned to their work, Alice brought her head close to Dorothy, the latter with her eyes wet and her lower lip pushed out.

"So, how about you tell me more about the email?"

"Emaail?"

"The one you sent me this morning! Did you forget!?"

Several seconds passed in silence. Alice reached out for the hardcover again.

"I wonder if you'll remember if I hit you with the dark and mysterious 1st edition of the "Dictionary of Cthulhu Mythos"?" [29]

"Noo. At the very least, let it be with "Memories of the Future"." [30]

"Däniken? So you like him too."

"Well, that's because he writes about the truth."

Dorothy smiled with a grin, and bonnk!, the binding of the "Dictionary of

Cthulhu Mythos" burst when the book hit the crown of her head.

"Nyarurah!?"

"Did you remember? If not, we can go on with the "Mu Special Compilation Encyclopedia Series". We have one on ESP, UFOs, mystery stuff, super-science, ghosts... I wonder how many books are there in total." [31]

"Using books as weapons, that's forbidden!"

"Okay, that's enough! It's forbidden to talk aloud~!"

The warning of their teacher Faye echoed through the room. Though she was by no means shouting, she projected her voice well.

Alice shrugged, and returned the hardcover she was holding to the table. They had really gone off track. Apparently, the mudhead there seemed to have forgotten the contents of the email she had taken seriously, even if only for a minute.

"Good grief... I thought this might happen, it's a good thing I copied it."

Sighing, Alice showed Dorothy her mobile's screen. Reflected there was the text of the email she had sent her that morning.

"Did you see?"

"Yes, I saw. That's the email I sent you."

"It'd be a serious situation if it wasn't from you. So, did you remember what you were going to say? If you can't, it's the encyclopedia series this time."

"I remember! Err... It's this, this thing."

To prevent Alice from reaching for the hardcover a third time, Dorothy thrust her hand into her bag in a hurry.

"Tadah!"

Dorothy proudly took out a jet-black cube.

"No way, it's the real deal?"

Frankly, the probability that she had obtained the real deal by chance, was plausible if it was Dorothy.

"Unfortunately, it's the replica that girl dropped."

Alice went "Wha~t" and drooped her shoulders hearing Dorothy's words.

"And, these are the results of Scarecrow's examination of it."

Dorothy showed one sheet of the printout to Alice. A detailed analysis of the cube was written there. It proved that the components of the replica, or one could say even its very nature, were exactly the same as the real deal.

"The fake is at the same level as the real deal."

With no difference at all that could reveal this one as the fake, it felt like a similar trick to the one with the golden boat days ago.

"Somehow, it appears the culprit of the secret substitutions is that child."

"More accurately, would it be the organization that child belongs to?"

Preparing such a replica expressly, what meaning was there in secretly substituting the real deal with them? What did the real deal have that the fake didn't?

"Say, Dorothy. What do you think is the difference between the two?"

"Myu". What the real deal has that the fake doesn't... For example, maybe it's something like a live goldfish versus a dead one?"

Though both goldfishes had the same components, the crucial difference was which one was alive. Unexpectedly, she might have not been off the mark.

"Live OOPArts...? So, you mean that's the "good thing that you found out"?"

"I didn't mean it had occurred to me!"

Dorothy proudly stuck out her thin chest.

"That's not how boasting works!"

"But, since it was Scarecrow, my brains, who thought of it, it's basically the same as if I had!"

Alice stared half-eyedly as Dorothy triumphantly folded her arms taking credit from others, and reached for the printout.

"So it's not you who is great, but Scarecrow, for reaching that conclusion in

such short a time. I wonder if we should try to scout her out?"

"You wouldn't! Scarecrow is my precious subordinate!"

"Yea yea, the Baum Foundation is blessed with very excellent talented people. Even with you mudhead managing it, somehow."

"Though I intended to have you cooperate with my strategy, I don't think you'll need the paper."

Dorothy stretched out her hand in an attempt to snatch the printout away from Alice.

"Cooperate?"

Alice dodged her hand and looked her in the face.

"Yes. No matter how much it resembles the real deal, a fake is a fake. Wouldn't you like to give this so-called Lord Irukinuf a taste of hell, Allie?"

"You bet I do."

"Then, it's the turn for the second sheet of the printout."

From under the printout that described the results of the cube's analysis, a second sheet appeared. Suddenly, the title of "Grand Strategy to Summon the Irukinuf Clan," written with cheerful letters, jumped into her eyes.

"As expected of Scarecrow."

Reading the text under the title, she was honestly impressed. Listed there were OOPArts that might have been secretly substituted by fakes with the same components as the real deals, and the OOPArts with no evidence of having been replaced secretly. The ones that were secretly replaced by fakes were all the first kind of OOPArts, the prehistoric ones. Scarecrow's plan was clear simple. Even Dorothy would understand this.

"So, in other words, the organization of this Irukinuf or whatever has secretly replaced the first kind of OOPArts with fakes."

"That's right."

"So, we'll lure them using OOPArts they haven't secretly replaced yet as bait."

"Yeah, that's about it."

"But, I can't mobilize the Foundation's stuff if I don't have permission from the 3 Queens."

"Even if you don't have the permission from the 3 Queens, we'll have enough forces with you, Allie. My subordinates will also put in their best efforts this time, we won't require the help from the Dodgson Foundation."

"That's reassuring."

With Dorothy as a bonus, the 3 of them, Scarecrow, Lumberjack and Löwe were very useful.

While Scarecrow the information chief was only human, she had information-gathering capabilities comparable to her Hatter from the Dodgson Foundation, and had the ability to formulate a feasible strategy that even the mudhead could understand. Besides, she also had a side to her that was a super-genius engineer that produced a variety of items making full use of the Baum Foundation's exclusive workshop. If Alice ever had the chance, the number one talent she'd want to recruit for herself was this person.

Dorothy's second subordinate would be Lumberjack, armored from head to toe, an enhanced soldier with the biometal called "Roswell Metal", a product of an unknown technology, endowed with the enemy searching analytic ability at the same level as the latest electronic surveillance planes. Besides, he had demonstrated his capabilities the other day by making Dorothy come back alive even from a submarine pyramid.

And the third person was Löwe. A beast woman with many mysteries, captured by the predecessor from the Baum house, Glinda. Her physical abilities were equal to Alice's in her Boost state.

Dorothy would be accompanied by three formidable people now. Even if Dorothy wasn't there, with these 3 people they probably wouldn't fall behind that tentacle child, Lynn.

"So, where do you intend to place the bait?"

"We settled for here."

"The club room!?"

"Yes. If it's here, even if things heat up and something gets broken, we can fix it with our influence and money, and since the private school is a kind of extraterritoriality, no nuisances will enter. It'd be quite troublesome if it was at Allie's house or ours, right?"

Still, the school's club room. Typical of Dorothy, a daring... I mean, an absurd strategy. No, it was Scarecrow who thought of it, so what exactly is she trying to pull here?

"I don't think it's a good idea either to make the enemy suddenly come to your stronghoold~"

With a *heh heh!*, Dorothy stuck out her slim chest again. Most probably what Scarecrow had told her beforehand.

"But, I wonder if the enemies will notice?"

"It's all right, we'll leave that to Scarecrow."

"How about some details?"

Dorothy gulped when Alice came closer.

"Uyu..."

Dorothy mumbled. It seems she really left it all to Scarecrow.

"See here..."

Just when Alice tried to give her a word of warning.

"Oh my, I wonder what you're talking about?"

A well-projected voice sounded from up close.

"Seems like you got a bit worked up."

Their teacher Faye, adviser of the literature club and beautiful one-armed woman, reached Alice's table while swinging her glamorous figure.

"S-Sorry, teacher."

As Alice apologized to Faye like an ordinary student, she hid the printout right away.

"I'd like you to be a bit quieter, but well, it can't be helped if you get caught up

in it. Since your teacher here loves your stories too, Alice, I'll let it slide just a bit."

"Thank you very much."

As they were members of the literature club, they had to publish some kind of works. Alice, in the guise of a co-authorship with Dorothy, had published some adventure stories. As a matter of fact, no one would realize their stories were non-fiction.

"And, what made you get so worked up?"

The teacher Faye pushed her voluptuous breasts against the table, as she brought her face closer to them.

"Won't the school festival be soon?"

"Yes. I heard the literature club also publishes a club journal issue matching the cultural festival."

"Along with the club journal, how about each member brings whatever the inspiration for their story was and displays it? I was asking Dorothy."

Alice smoothly spoke of her idea. Even if she planned to push forward her strategy regardless of the literature club's advisor, she should go through the motions to carry it out.

"Well, isn't that nice? The literature club's displays are always rather dull."

Faye smiled with a grin.

"And, what will you two display? You can't bring dangerous or expensive things here."

"I'll bring a replica straight out of what I'm writing with Dorothy."

"Replica?"

"Many of them came out in stores a bit earlier. With sweets as a bonus." [32]

Dorothy answered before Faye had the time to ask any question.

"Yeah. Like the collection of mysterious animals, or the collection of superancient civilizations." Alice backed up Dorothy's words. At the very least, they wanted the ordinary people, including their teacher, to think that was the case.

"Yes, that sounds interesting."

"For this reason, we want to carry it out at once tonight."

"Oh my, on such short notice."

"Is it no good?"

Even if it was soon, there was still a day before the school festival. Even if she declined, it couldn't be helped, but Alice waited for Faye's answer in silence.

"I don't mind. I'll talk to the guards, so do as you like."

Faye gave a blooming smile and moved away from their table.

"Phew..."

Alice gave a sigh of relief, and regaining her foothold, make a small victory pose. Though they had improvised it, they had somehow pulled through.

"Dorothy, it seems we'll be busy tonight."

"Yes. But, one thing before that."

"What? Is there something you want to do?"

"Can you lend me the notes a little longer? I fell asleep through a~ll of today's classes... tehe."

Dorothy put on a pleading smile, and grabbed Alice's notes.

A solitary island far off in the ocean, covered in a deep jungle. Adding to the fact that it wasn't listed in any map, it largely deviated from the routes of boats and planes, and not even satellites passed over it for some reason, so no person was aware of the island's existence. Even the odd person who arrived by chance wouldn't come back alive either.

All over that island, waterways and pyramid-like hills that could have only been built artificially protruded from the jungle. A plaza had been prepared halfway up

a mountain in the middle of them, with a temple decorated with countless stone pillars. The temple had architecture reminiscent of the ancient Greece and Rome, there were 12 entasis pillars carved elaborately, a person's silhouette visible at the base of each of them.

A young red-headed girl walked towards the throne placed among the huge pillars arranged in symmetry, 6 to the left and to the right. An elderly gentleman was sitting in the throne ahead of them.

Upon a closer look at the gentleman's shape, one would notice that his bottom swelled unnaturally from his waist. In actuality, what constituted the lower part of his body weren't feet. It was an organ formed by four thick tentacles. In his hand, he had a cane with a complexly entangled tentacle in it.

"That's far enough!"

At around 10 meters before she reached the throne, two men came out from the left and right and called her to a halt. A hero with a bald head exposing the upper half of his body, covered with thriving muscles, and a giant who had grown a beard of fluttering, black curly hair.

"Dear me, the Great Tentacles Lord Leonidaas and Lord Rasputin. Whatever are you stopping me foor?" [33]

The girl's voice spread through the temple like a song.

"You were found out. Didn't you go too far this time?" [34]

"We're those who lurk in the darkness of history and rule over humans. Did you forget the rules that state you mustn't attract attention? No matter how much the Tentacle King naively regards you as his Songstress, we say that's intolerable."

The people there at the base of the stone pillars agreed with the pair's words.

"With a social standing of a mere Four Tentacles, even standing in front of us, the 12 Apostles of the Tentacle God, is the height of impudence."

"Know your place, lass!"

The commotion spread around the throne.

"Oh, please calm down, all of you 12 Apoostles."

Without even flinching among the powerful atmosphere of intimidation, the red-haired girl's well-projected voice echoed throughout.

"I have come here todaay, to tell everyone that we've regained a part of our God, Lord Irukinuf's body."

The red-headed girl fluttered her skirt, and a jet black cube appeared between her legs, which fell down slowly.

"Ooh! T-That's!"

"Could it be, the Salzburg Cube!?"

Nodding at the 12 Apostles' words, the red-haired girl held out the jet black cube in front of Leonidas and Rasputin.

"You can't possibly have forgootten, the purpose of our cult dating baack to BC, have you?"

The young girl asked to the throne behind Leonidas, her tone full of confidence.

"No one here has forgotten."

The 12 Apostles straightened themselves all at once, hearing the voice from the throne.

"Tentacle King Swodar."

The red-headed girl quickly prostrated, and the 12 Apostles soon followed.

"Lynn. You did well, coming back with the Salzburg Cube."

Swodar Nyarmain rose up from the throne, and slowly got closer to the girl, skillfully moving the tentacles of his lower body.

"Stand back, Rasputin, Leonidas."

Rasputin went back to the pillar's base, following the Tentacle King's orders. Leonidas did the same, as he flexed his pectoral muscles brimming with strength.

"Behold, 12 Apostles of mine. The revival of our God!"

The Tentacle King screamed out, and held out the cane in his hand towards the

Salzburg Cube.

Gyurun.

Along with the sound of something moving quickly, the Tentacle King's cane came undone, and wriggled with countless tentacles. With a movement reminiscent of deep-sea organisms searching for food, the tentacles extending from the cane preyed on the Salzburg Cube.

<Servants of minnnne.>[35]

A voice rang in the mind of everyone with tentacles present at the shrine. At the same time, the closed eyelid at the top of the Tentacle King's cane opened, and a rainbow-colored eye appeared.

"Lord Irukinuf's eye!"

"So the Cube was genuine?"

A feeling of joy, surprise and delight ran among the 12 Apostles.

<Child of Irukinuf. You did well, restoring my body. I'll give you a rewarrrrd.>

This cane was the Tentacle God Irukinuf, the object of worship of the Irukinuf cult. And it extended a tentacle, grabbing the body of the red-haired girl in an instant.

"Hianh!"

Feeling the touch of the chilly tentacle groping her body impudently, the redheaded girl gave up on her body, that turned red bright, and the four tentacles that extended from her waist changed from transparent to pale pink.

"Aanh, it-it's beeen a whiile... aah!"

The tentacle groping her body finally arrived at the location it seeked, and rushed into the girl's hole.

"Ugh... bufuh..."



Her breathing completely obstructed, the girl fell into dyspnea, and the strength left her body.

<Die and be reborn, thou shall obtain a new life and powerrrr!>

The tentacles that clung to the girl and infringed upon her body pulsated with something... then released her, and shrunk and gathered into a cane form again, with a shrinking noise.

Meanwhile, the girl collapsed on the shrine's floor as if she were dead. Before long, before the gazes of the Tentacle King and the 12 Apostles, the girl's body began twitching and convulsing.

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"For a new power!"
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Following the Tentacle King's words, the 12 Apostles responded by extending the tentacles from their bodies.

The Irukinuf cult had existed all the way since the creation of mankind. Among the believers, the proof of the upper echelons were those tentacles, that were also a testament that they had been granted a seed from Irukinuf, which let them live for a thousand years with just one of them. And now, the girl lying dead in front of them had been given a new seed by Irukinuf. If the fertilization and germination succeeded, she'd acquire even more power.

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"Wake up! You who hold the title of Songstress!"
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"Wake up!"

As if responding to the call, something began wriggling in the girl's skirt.

"Ah....."

A voice leaked from the girl's mouth.

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"Aah..... hiah..... Nkuuh~~~"
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With a moan-like scream, what would become her fifth tentacle grew from the lower part of her body.

"Awaken, Songstress Lynn!"

Led by the Tentacle King's body, the red-haired girl, Lynn, raised her body.

[&]quot;For a new power!"

"No matter how many tilmes, it's still greeat~!"

Lynn gave a sigh, with red cheeks and a smiling expression of ecstasy.

After making sure of Lynn's revival, Irukinuf close its eye.

<It's not enough yet. More... regain more of my body partssss...>

Irukinuf went to sleep again in the Tentacle King's hands.

"I'll give you a new mission."

As the 12 Apostles watched attentively, the Tentacle King gave Lynn a new command.

"So sooon? You work your men haard, Tentacle Kiing."

"It's a job no one but you can do. There's someone I want to add to our midst."

The Tentacle King's words caused a stir among the Apostles. Several years had passed since the last time the Tentacle King himself invited a new comrade. But, 100 years earlier, and even a good several hundred years before that, it was a rather common occurrence. One could say that continuing the trend in such a short span of time was exceptional.

"The two girls that you encountered in Moscow. This girl, the "Gate Opener." And bring the "Trap Avoider" too."

The Apostles reacted to the words, "Gate Opener."

"That mission was Yue Ying's!"

A female Apostle wearing Chinese clothes raised her voice.

"That's too heavy a load for a Five Tentacles. Leave that to us, the Great Tentacles!"

The Tentacle King quelled the 12 Apostles' voices by raising his right hand.

"Don't be impatient. You 12 Apostles have another duty. There's a granite disk from the Dropa tribe, the Dorchester Pot, there are still many Irukinuf body parts to gather. And the Gate must also be in working order soon... to avoid the destruction in 2012!"[36]

The Tentacle King's words straightened up the 12 Apostles.

"In that caase, you can leave it to Lynniie!"

Seeing the 12 Apostles holding back, Lynn stepped forward towards the Tentacle King.

"Buut, what if she refuses being our comraade?"

"She won't. You should remember the reaction when that person came in contact with the Salzburg Cube."

Smiling, the Tentacle King went back to his throne, the dormant Irukinuf in hand.

"You were lookiing... perveert."

The Tentacle King ignored Lynn and sat down on the throne. Having become Tentacle King with 9 Tentacles, seeing the world through the field of vision of a lower-ranking existence wasn't difficult. Recalling the event that occurred when that girl had held the Salzburg Cube, the Tentacle King closed his eyes.

" "Gate Opener." Soon, we'll face each other again..."

Remembering the appearance of the silver-haired girl in a battle dress, the Tentacle King started meditating.

This text is a machine translation (MTL).

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.



This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

Chapter 3: Fierce Fighting at the Academy

"Did she leave?"

Yue Ying quietly murmured, as she saw off the aircraft leaving the island. [37] The shapes of the aircrafts were generally rich in variety, from discal to conical. A few kilometers after leaving the island, the aircraft will then blend into the sky. That way, it wouldn't be witnessed. In rare cases, humans who noticed them would make a big fuss about UFOs.

Yue Ying turned on her heels, and directed her gaze to the shrine. There was no trace anymore of the commotion from when Irukinuf's Songstress, Lynn, had been given a new tentacle. The Tentacle King was back into meditating, and the 12 Apostles had returned to their posts to fulfill each of their duties. Including herself, only a few people remained at the shrine.

The total number of pillars rising at the shrine were 72. It represented the number of upper Tentacles that served the Tentacle King Swodar Nyarmain and his master, the Tentacle God Irukinuf. The number remained fixed since a long time ago, back when Swodar was called Solomon. As for how much the number would go up were one to include the lower believers without tentacles, that was something Yue Ying didn't know.

She heard that those who got a role to intervene in the human society, like Rasputin, were accompanied by many lower believers, but that was something irrelevant for Yue Ying. It had been a long time since the last time she was interested about the rise and fall of the nations. When her husband Zhuge Liang, aka Kongming, died, the country he had created fell apart, and she left it all behind. [38]

An eternity had passed since then, the way of life of her former friends and husband having become a myth. She had met the Tentacle King in frustration, and it had been like 2000 years since she became a believer of Irukinuf. And now

she had just seen off the girl who left to make a new comrade join them. [39]

By fusing themselves with Irukinuf's body cells, the believers could acquire various abilities. Their life was greatly extended, and no matter how much time passed, they showed no signs of aging. There were a lot of people that had lived for a several thousand years, like herself, Leonidas, and the oldest from the Tentacle Group, Rama.

But if it was just to follow a life with no purpose, Yue Ying would have rotten away long ago, as others did. During these several thousand years, as one would expect, there had been many who died because they couldn't withstand the enormous power Irukinuf had given them, as well as those believers who had lost sight of their purpose and perished. In that sense, she thanked the Tentacle King for giving her a purpose.

The purpose the Tentacle King had given her was to analyze the transfer device called the Gate. Being able as she was to have a glimpse of near endless parallel words through the Gate, there was no place for boredom. Still, the annoying part was that Yue Ying could merely look at it, she couldn't cross over to the Gate's parallel worlds. Her seventh tentacle, broken off in the middle, and the mere root remaining from her eighth tentacle, were testaments to that.

Even for her, who carried eight tentacles of Irukinuf and had a body close to the ultimate life form, it was impossible to cross over parallel worlds. But, there was someone who had managed to. Lewis, the mother of the "Gate Opener," also known as the "Gate Toucher." The analysis of the Gate had gone swimmingly thanks to her. Based on the data she had left behind, they had been able to discover some lost Gates.

By the end of the next day, the adjustment of the Gates they had brought to this island would be over. That said...

"There's something I'm wondering about..."

The words unintentionally escaped her lips. Occasionally, the Tentacle King acted as if he could foresee the future. He had made Lewis touch the dangerous Gate as if she was expected to. Also, the way he often interacted with the Irukinuf's Songstress. But even though he had taken measures about the upcoming Irukinuf's rampage, due in a few years, and told them to obtain the

required body parts for Irukinuf's body to return to perfection once again, these measures were too lenient.

"Irukinuf's rampage." That referred to the fact that the current, incomplete Irukinuf couldn't control its own power, so, according to the Tentacle King's experience and estimations, it would be the year 2012 when Irukinuf's power would start going wild. Also, it was said that the true power Irukinuf possessed was one that reduced the molecules' movement speed. In other words, it was the power to cause a sudden drop in temperature. The storm of ultra-low temperature Irukinuf would create in its rampage would not just stop at the collapse of the human civilization, but would destroy the Earth's ecosystem by means of global freezing.

Even Tentacle King with his current strong body would have a hard time surviving a world where the whole Earth, including the oceans, was frozen. For this purpose, the Tentacle Group was collecting the Irukinuf's body parts that came to be known as OOPArts, scattered around this world, and in the process were sending out a message: "The crisis of the world is imminent. Gather under Irukinuf, and save the world."

"O King. What are you thinking about?"

Yue Ying, the beauty with red-brownish hair, left the shrine, lost in thought.

Her job as one of the 12 Apostles of the Tentacle God, as a Great Tentacle with eight tentacles ranking just below the Tentacle King's Nine Tentacles, was to research and start preparations on the Gate. There was a lot of work to do in the island, and many circumstances to consider.

"Lady World's best schemer, sounds like you're worried."

A voice calling out to her interrupted Yue Ying's deep thoughts.

"Rasputin. Do you need something?"

"Not much in particular, I just thought we could have a little chat."

The Great Tentacle Rasputin. An elite among elites, that man had risen up to Eight Tentacles in the blink of an eye (in less than a hundred years, to be exact) silently showed up in front of Yue Ying.

"Coming out from a woman's shadow can't be said to be a good hobby."

"Oh, excuse my manners."

"This is good timing. There's something I wanted to ask you, too."

"What an amazing coincidence."

"The Salzburg Cube was hidden in Russia, that was your jurisdiction."

"Yes."

"Did the Songstress really steal a march on you?"

A contemptuous smile appeared on Rasputin's face after her question.

"Do you doubt little old me?"

"Yes. I don't think the man that became a Great Tentacle, one of the 12 Apostles, in less than 100 years wouldn't be watching his steps."

His only answer was a contemptuous smile, that she interpreted as confirmation.

"Rasputin. What are you thinking about? Keeping parts of our God's body hidden."

"Acts of betrayal would rightly get my tentacles cut off... was that it?"

He took the words straight from Yue Ying's mouth.

"If you know, then why?"

"Frankly speaking, should I say I distrust the Tentacle King?"

"I'll pretend I didn't hear."

Yue Ying turned away from Rasputin. The words right now could be considered treason against the Tentacle King.

"We serve the Tentacle God Irukinuf. Not the Tentacle King."

"Your excessive ambition will be your undoing."

Yue Ying told him in a mocking tone. Rasputin was still young. Youngsters had the illusion that they were all powerful.

"Then I ask, Lady Yue Ying, what's this Gate you're hastening to restore under

the Tentacle King's orders?"

"I don't know what it is."

Yue Ying dodged the question, cautious against her partner's attitude. The reason behind the Tentacle King's haste in restoring the Gate was his intention to use it to send Irukinuf back to its original world. Completing the Gate was the true purpose of the Irukinuf cult, and also why Irukinuf had given the believers its own power. But only a few among the 12 Apostles were privy to this information.

"After sending Irukinuf back through the Gate, what will happen to us?"

"...Who did you hear that from?"

Rasputin didn't bother to answer Yue Ying's question, he just went on talking.

"Just like Irukinuf, Arukinuf should have drifted to this world, how can we protect the world against it?"

"I won't let you speak any more about that topic!"

Before Rasputin could notice, Yue Ying had gotten hold of her "Zhǎngsuì jiàn", and now pushed it right before his eyes. ^[40]

"The Gate is our earnest wish. You need not concern yourself with it."

Arukinuf. That was a taboo name. Paired with Irukinuf, it was the name of the God of Destruction in a parallel world. ^[41]

"Aren't you following orders without thinking, then?"

"This is the conclusion I reached after extensive deliberation long before you were born. And, your thoughts also being leaked to the Tentacle King. You should appreciate our King's generous discretion."

"Kukukukuku, is that how it is?"

Rasputin twisted his lips in a smile.

"What?"

"The Tentacle King can't read the thoughts of little old me. If you think that's a lie, please read my thoughts, by all means. If you Lady Yue Ying have been

serving the Tentacle King longer than little old me, it should be child's play."

Hearing him say so, Yue Ying looked into Rasputin's eyes. Even though both were the same rank, 12 Apostles, if Yue Ying had more experience as a believer than him, she should be able to read his thoughts.

However:

"...I can't read them?"

"Kukukukuku, I'm told this ability is unique to little old me and the Tentacle King. By the way, what do you suppose would happen if there was another Tentacle King with Nine Tentacles?"

"Another Tentacle King?"

The words uttered by Rasputin were very dangerous for the Irukinuf cult, considering the fact that many people of transcendence gathered there. There was only one existence such as the Tentacle God Irukinuf's. And thus, just one Tentacle King as well to wield it directly. That was a law of the Irukinuf Cult in order to prevent fights among the people of transcendence, but if that didn't apply anymore...

The Book Building of St. Label's Academy.

A large-sized plate was attached to the entrance of some empty librarian rooms. The words "Literature Club Exhibition Hall" were written on it, with a tasteful touch to them.

"Dorothy, is this good here?"

"Yeah-, that's qui-te all right. Please put it so that we can see the inlay properly."

Dorothy was giving instructions to the members, who were arranging the OOPArts that would become the bait in the exhibition hall. They were separating them into several exhibition rooms, out of consideration to not involve in the fight all the other exhibits the rest of the members had brought.

On a white table cloth that covered the folding table used for the exhibition,

the genuine OOPArts Dorothy had brought were on display now, unguarded. One could wonder if that was the proper way to treat such precious inheritance...

As she sat on a chair, Alice was half-eyedly staring at the members' work.

Aah! Hey theere! Don't even think of grabbing those with your bare hands! If the grease from his hands gets on them, they're gonna oxidize!

Barely enduring her impulses to start shouting at them, Alice oversaw the preparations being completed. The members wouldn't even imagine that what they were holding were actually the genuine articles. It couldn't be helped if they treated them roughly. Yeah, it couldn't be helped...

"I won't have that-!!"

Hearing her sudden scream, the members' eyes concentrated on Alice.

"What's wrong, Chief?"

"Is there something you're missing?"

"Maybe you can't stand not having that [42]... Ugyah!?"

The third boy, the one who had blurted out that joke, fainted when the hardcover Alice threw hit him. He was called Rancourt, a boy who wrote a story about a maid who served everyone for free all over the world in the current literature club journal. Just one of the members who didn't participate in club activities among the large staff, he did get some points for working hard, aside from his ideas.

But, Alice couldn't stand his personality and his indecent behavior. In times like these, she'd like to have a device that made a pit appear under guys who made vulgar remarks with just the press of a finger.

"What's that thing you were saying that I don't have yet... huuh?"

Alice rose up, swaying. Since she tried to keep her day-to-day, it seemed like she had to indulge the ordinary people. She closed a new book with a 'thud', and holding it, Alice looked down at the boy who had fallen unconscious.

"How long do you intend to sleep? If you have that much talent as a performer, why don't you become an actor?"

She stepped on the visible half of Rancourt's face with the tip of her boots.

"Bubehh!?"

"Oh, that's a good answer. It seems you want to be in the drama club."

While twisting her lips, Alice raised her hardcover.

"W-Wait a bit, Chief, that's too much for a joke, it's too much!"

"Whatever happens with that thing of mine, why would it be your business"?"

"It-It's not, really!"

"If it's not your business, watch your rude tongue. I hate vulgar men."

Despite having his face stepped on, Rancourt nodded with desperation in his eyes, *nod nod*.

"By the way, about me acting like I don't have "that", it's not like I specially want to, nor do I want to meet your expectations."

Finally, she twisted her boot's tip light with a grinding sound, and raised it from the male member's face. Since it'd be bad if she got serious, she ended up being gentle... yeah, she'd leave it at that.

"While I'm at it, you guys!"

Next, Alice aimed her sharp gaze at the staff who had been watching the situation. Their backs straightened with a *snap*.

"No matter if it's just a replica, don't touch it with your bare hands!"

The other members gently left on the table the items they were holding.

"Yeah, like that, and treat them carefully! Where's my reply!?"

"Sir, yes sir!"

"Good! And finally, Dorothy!"

"Yes!?"

Dorothy's body jumped in surprise, suddenly turning into her target as she was.

"You also have to pay a bit more attention to how these guys act! Get angry

every once in a while! You're spoiling them too much lately! Got it!?"

"Y-Yes!"

Seeing Dorothy's frightened expression, Alice's bad mood went away.

"No matter if the advisor here, our teacher Faye, is having a break; I won't forgive you if you slack off."

After telling off the staff, Alice sat back on the chair she was on until a few moments ago. She had to let it out of her system, after all. As for the members Alice had scolded, they properly started wearing gloves and caring for the exhibits now.

Or rather, if they had some, use them from the beginning-! After retorting in her mind, Alice reached for her cell. She opened it over her legs, making it into a handy palm-sized PC, and operating several keys, requested the required information from the monitor. If watched from afar, she'd only appear to be caught up in a manuscript for the club journal.

Oh, here it is, here it is.

Seeing the e-mail that had come from Hatter, she opened the file burning with anticipation. The title was "Creation Myth of Irukinuf/Arukinuf." That was her Hatter, achieving such results in one night. Her eyes sped through the file's contents.

"In the beginning, there were two Gods, Arukinuf and Irukinuf..."

Arukinuf was the herald of fire, destruction and death, Irukinuf the herald of ice, regeneration and death. The two Gods usually had stretched out battles with each other. The flame rock Arukinuf dropped would rebound in Irukinuf's ice mirror. After a long time battling, Irukinuf was brought down from heaven by Arukinuf's plan, for Irukinuf to give life to a barren land. Irukinuf prayed to the gods, but they didn't have the powers to return him to heaven. Even so, Irukinuf's nature was also death, alas. When he didn't have enough strength to return to heaven, he decided on divine punishment against life. Letting the ground and sea freeze, he came back to life creating a white world. However, Irukinuf gave all new life with his regenerative powers. Irukinuf, wanting to go back to heaven, created life again.

"Hmm..."

A myth of dualism? Alice closed the file. It's not like she was disappointed at Hatter for only achieving this... On the contrary, that was a testament to what lengths the enemies were going to skillfully hide their tracks.

In fact, the affair at the Museum of the Soviet Army from the other day not only had been covered up in Russia, none of it had come up in any online conversations or phone calls. Underestimating them would prove dangerous.

"With this, all is ready."

Dorothy sat down beside Alice with a cheerful voice.

"Good work."

She said, as she folded the monitor casually. Though they were cooperating for now, Dorothy was still a rival, basically. She shouldn't show her hand any more than necessary.

"You Allie too, good work."

"I didn't do anything, I just coached these morons."

"Yeah, seems like that was a nice reward for them. Rancourty was quite pleased."

"Huuh?"

Alice replied involuntarily. Did he enjoy being stomped on? Did that guy have those kinds of hobbies?

Guh, how gross. She had to try and stay away from that guy now. For the time being, there was no way she'd go within a 3-meter radius of him. If possible, she'd rather not breathe the same air as that pervert, but since she had to go to school and experience the daily life to inherit the Foundation, she'd have to settle on 3 meters for the bare minimum.

"Do you think he'd be pleased if he was a normal boy?"

"Why? Are all men perverts?"

"Uhihihihihi."

As Alice looked at her with a confused face, an uncute laughter came from

Dorothy's otherwise cute face.

"W-Why are you laughing!"

"It's such a simple thing, yet you really haven't noticed. Uhihihi, what a laugh."

Alice's body stiffened at Dorothy's words. Something simple she hadn't noticed? It couldn't be...

"Rancourty was able to see your panties, Allie."

"Gya~~hh!!"

Despite having been expecting that reply from Dorothy, Alice still screamed the same. The other members went like "Again?" and shifted their gaze to the girls.

"Y-You all, man your posts properly! I mean, get to work!!"

Alice scolded the staff with a bright red face.

"You too, if you notice that, tell me earlier."

She got closer to Dorothy and told her in a whisper.

"Buut Allie, your battle uniform is like that too, I was so sure you liked flashing them around."

"I'll be damned if I do!"

Alice shouted, giving a chop on her head to Dorothy, who was showing a lecherous smile.

Sometimes, when she performed some intense actions in her battle uniform, her panties might be completely exposed, she had to admit it. But that much couldn't be helped, she needed to wear clothes with a design that could deal with her body expanding due to the Boost, she definitely had no hobbies like enjoying flashing her panties. In the first place, the lower part of her combat uniform was no underwear. That was something Alice firmly believed in.

To think her pants were showing in her day-to-day school life...

"Uugh. It's the blunder of a lifetime. I'll have to wear bloomers so that no one can peek under my uniform next time."

Alice hung her shoulders, crestfallen, and turned her back to Dorothy, who was

now crouching and grabbing her head. She was unaware that her fashion choice would draw even more enthusiasts...

Four o'clock in the afternoon. Before the gate of the St. Labels Academy, crowded with students going home, there were a man and a woman.

"St. Label's Academy... here it iis."

A girl holding a map wearing a red flare skirt, reminiscent of some stage clothes, that fluttered in the wind; a man wearing a hakama with a sword in the guise of a swordsman out of a period drama. [43] Both turned their gaze from the school gate to the school building. Though their appearance was highly conspicuous, even if the students passing by their side looked in their direction, they showed no signs of noticing anything weird.

"Was this certain companion said to be here?"

"She iis. Guess you're no good for thiis, Hi-pon, you're too serious, let's spread ouut." [44]

The girl with the well-projected voice replied to the master swordsman beside her.

"I'm looking forward to it, then." [45]

"I'll go fiirst as a Tentacle Member to see the situation, Hi-pon, please stand by here properlyy." [46]

"Acknowledged."

The swordsman retreated one step, and his figure disappeared as if vanishing into thin air.

"A shadow line technique at that, you're quite skillful for a masteer." [47] Showing her admiration, the girl stepped towards the school building.

The Dorchester Pot. Found on 1852 in Massachusetts, Dorchester. A metal pot resembling a bell-shaped vase, a floral design is exquisite inlaid in sterling silver on its side. From the excavated stratum, it was thought to be more than 100,000 years old. [48]

The Spear of Kushiro. An iron spear found on 1931 in the aqueous rock cliff on the coast of Kushiro, Hokkaido, Japan. Since it'd have been created after the aqueous rock precipitated into the water and deposited itself there, the lowest estimates assume it was buried tens of thousands of years ago. ^[49]

The inheritances Dorothy brought were these two items that could be called first-class OOPArts at the same level as the Salzburg Cube. Like the Salzburg Cube, they shared the common trait that the metal hadn't corroded even after tens of thousands of years.

Besides, there were crystal skulls and dinosaur figures, the fossil of a trilobite stepped on by sandals, such OOPArts easily understandable by the commoners were displayed; they were taking tally of the replicas now. ^[50]

"Even so, I can't believe..."

Alice turned to the Dorchester Pot. At first glance it only looked like an antique vase so she hadn't paid it any notice, but it sure looked magnificent when displayed at the club room.

"Since when is it here?"

"If you mean the pot, it's been here since spring. Since the club room is so tasteless, I brought it to decorate it with some flowers, you hadn't noticed?"

"I had not."

Alice asserted so flatly. Where in the world would you find someone fool enough to use OOPArts like this! Ah, standing in front of her, right?

"So, how will we lure those people?"

"You don't need to worry."

With a big smile, Dorothy held out her mobile phone's liquid crystal panel in front of Alice. On it was displayed an advertising blog about the activities of the literature club.

"Scarecrow said that, since they seemed to be monitoring our actions, there should be a reaction even if we scatter just a little bait around."

A bit lackadaisical operation plan for Alice, who hung her head again. But, Mudhead there aside, Scarecrow could be trusted. It was also thanks to her subordinate that Dorothy could continue Treasure Hunting on a level similar to hers.

"You don't mean that's everything, right?"

"Of course. Based on our encounter at that Museum of the Soviet Army, Scarecrow made a detector."

"A detector?"

"More accurately, it's a sensor that receives the unique vibration waves the invisible tentacles emit."

In the middle of Dorothy's proper explanation, a vigorous music suddenly began playing from her mobile. It was quite reminiscent of the march of a military band, it really didn't fit her style.

"This way, when it catches those guys' natural vibration waves, it'll tell us through a special melody and red flashes."

The mobile in Dorothy's hand blinked red once and again.

"It's failing right away?"

"I don't think that's the case, but..."

Dorothy violently hit the mobile.

"Ah!"

Alice was at a loss for words, but Dorothy continued impudently abusing her cell all the same.

"Father says that most machines get fixed if you hit them."

"But, isn't that bad for a precision instrument?"

"Uhihihi, Father's words aren't wrong."

Dorothy hit the mobile with a firm confidence. However, the flashing showed

no signs of stopping. On the contrary, it was getting more and more intense. And there were more of them than before too.

"Won't it get broken?"

"No, if it broke with just this much, it wouldn't qualify as a tool for a Treasure Hunter."

As Dorothy pouted, she showed off the mobile's emblem to Alice. It was the mark of the communication company Metalcom, under the umbrella of the Baum Foundation. Its slogan was, "It won't break even if pounded with a hammer:" it was a product from manufacturers that dealt with sturdiness. It wouldn't break with Dorothy's strikes.

"So that means... it can't be?"

"Isn't this too early?"

Alice and Dorothy looked at each other.

"Nyufufufufufu."

At that time, following the familiar sounding laughter:

"Hee~lloooo~~~"

A well-projected voice echoed. A melody faintly reminiscent of a harp overlapped with the girl's transparent voice.

"She really came."

"She did come."

Alice and Dorothy remained in the same posture they had when they were looking at each other, only their gaze turned to the entrance.

"I fancied a vii~~~siit"

Shining with a brightening expression, a girl in a fluttering red skirt was looking at them from the exhibition hall's entrance. There was no mistake. She was the one who had taken the Salzburg Cube from the Museum of the Soviet Army, the alleged "Irukinuf's Songstress."

"Could I have a touur?"

"Yes, that's okay. It's not open to the public yet, though."

Protecting Dorothy behind her, Alice stepped forward to face Lynn, Irukinuf's Songstress.

"Thank you very muuch. Since I have something important to tell to you while I'm at iit, I wished the unrelated people would leeave."

As Lynn was speaking, the staff cheerfully began getting ready to go back home.

"Well then seniors, we're going ahead-"

"Oh? Isn't it still too early?"

The hands on the watch were a little past four o'clock. It was a little early to go back home for all those members who liked to get caught up in useless debates until five at least.

"We don't know why, but we want to go back."

The staff answered Dorothy's question.

"Yeah, it's like we mustn't be here."

"Come to think of it, I've been hungry for a while."

As they answered without free will, the members finished getting ready to leave.

"Allie, this is..."

Dorothy whispered. None of the members was looking at Lynn. They unconsciously tried not to catch sight of her.

"Do you understand why?"

"Yes."

Dorothy's mobile blinked again. A special sensor placed inside it was sensing some kind of waves being emitted beyond the human audible range. This was one of the features Scarecrow had prepared in response to the encounter from the other day.

"It seems that girl is able to control others with some sort of hypnotic wave."

The guards at Moscow had been a little strange too, they probably had been manipulated in this same way. And she was likely making the members here leave with a trick of the sort. It seemed the other party wanted to reduce as much as possible dealing with the aftermath of involving innocents.

"But, why aren't we affected?"

Alice shrugged her shoulders at Dorothy's question, opened both hands and after answering with a zany "Who knows?", she lowered her arms and lightly clenched her fists. What she was holding now was metal balls of about 2 cm of diameter that had fallen from her sleeve and rolled into her hands.

Stun Balls. They were a non-lethal weapon that used a high-voltage current to give a strong shock and stun the victim. Lynn's hypnotic waves probably had directivity, and were likely not to affect anyone but the victims they were aimed at. ^[51] If she aimed them at Alice, it was no problem since her familiar Kuranes who camouflaged as hair ornaments would neutralize it, but what would happen if Dorothy was the one targeted? It'd be tough if she got attacked from behind.

Should she stun Dorothy before it was too late? Since she was a friend, she had chosen the Stun Balls out of consideration.

"Just because we won't be here, don't do naughty things with our senior Dorothy."

Alice's tension vanished at once hearing the staff's words.

"W-Who would?! I am normal!"

Hearing Alice's roar, the members went out of the exhibition room in small groups.

"Good grief..."

Dorothy, don't worry. If you got manipulated by the hypnotic waves, you would attack in the same way as the guards from the Museum of the Soviet Army, and there's no way Scarecrow wouldn't have taken measures to prevent it.

Still, even if she said it herself, she had quite the high opinion of Scarecrow. Alice involuntarily smiled with some self-scorn.

"Nyufufufufu, having fun is the most importaant."

Laughing with a smile, Lynn reached out to the heritages placed on the table.

"Hey there, don't touch the exhibits without permission."

"Aw", stingyy."

"Then, what did you come for?"

"You're so impatieent. But, it's good that you understaand."

Lynn took half a step away from the table the exhibits were placed on, and theatrically spread both arms.

"I'll be frank: become our comraade."

"What's in it for me if I become your comrade?"

Alice asked, hiding the Stun Ball behind her.

"If you meet the expectations of the Tentacle King Lord Swodar Nyarmain, you'll obtain a life span of several hundred years. And, you'll remain youung!"

Alice reacted to the name Lynn spoke of. Swodar Nyarmain: the first discoverer of the Highlands' megalithic structure. And the same man that might have been together with her mother Lewis, just before she went missing.

"What did you say just now?"

"A life span of several hundred yeaars~"

"No, before that! The Tentacle King or something."

Alice shouted involuntarily.

"Lord Swodar Nyarmaiin."

She smiled faintly, hearing Lynn's words. She could see very well the important connection leading to her mother's whereabouts.

"Swodar... so he's alive."

"Nyufufufu, how about iit, won't you join uus~?"

Should she accept Lynn's proposal, or not? She would obtain information easily if she followed them.

"If I become your comrade, I can stay young."

As she replied, Alice lightly turned her eyes towards the outside of the window. The members of the staff had already gone back home. It was just them in the library.

"A-Allie?"

Dorothy pulled on Alice's sleeve.

If she was on her own, following them could be a choice, but there was Dorothy here. After the encounter in Moscow, she was a partner who had chosen to join hands with her. She couldn't simply disregard her.

"I've decided."

Alice chose the course of action of capturing Lynn and making her talk.

"Oh goody, then, will you become our comraade?"

Lynn's eyes widened.

"Unfortunately, I refuse. I don't want to be a monster's comrade."

At the same time she bluntly said so, she threw the Stun Balls she was holding towards the fire alarm's switch.

"Wwha!?"

The roaring from the fire prevention doors closing sounded along with the bell. During the five minutes it'd take the fire brigade to come and confirm if there was a fire, they had the Book Building for themselves.

"What!?"

As Lynn remained confused by Alice's movements, the sprinklers used for fire extinguishing above her, malfunctioning due to the electric shock the Stun Balls had emitted, scattered a light rain.

"Looks like your invisible stuff came out in the open."

Alice pointed at Lynn.

"Hey, you can see it too, right, Dorothy?"

"Yeah, quite beautifully at that."

Even for invisible materials, they couldn't prevent the light rain from falling on them. The shape of the tentacles with a striped pattern that extended from Lynn's waist were now visible, flicking under the light rain.

"...This means, negotiations broke doown."

"You got that right."

Alice took out several Trumps (playing cards) from the breast pocket of her uniform, one after another.

"Nyufufufu, even theen, I appreciate you giving me theese."

Smiling, Lynn grabbed the inheritances on the table with her tentacles.

"Ah-, those are things from my house!"

"If that's what you think, get them back!"

Alice turned her body around with a *whirl*, and threw Dorothy, who she had kept behind her, towards Lynn.

"Hyauh, it's cold!"

Dorothy advanced in a panic, getting soaked due to the cold water released by the sprinkler.

"Youu aall are juust nuisances to Lyynn"

Lynn took one step back and talked towards her back with a singing voice:

"Nyufufufu. It's your turn, you guuys."

Along with Lynn's words, a sheet of spray splashed out. Something hidden had jumped out from behind her. Their figure became visible once bathed in the water from the sprinkler, one appearing after the other.

"Ugh, I was better off not seeing them."

They were men in ninja costumes, with an eerie tentacle coming out of their mouths. Grimacing with an expression like she had seen something disgusting, Alice started preparing her next actions.

Wriggling their tentacles like a long tongue, the men in ninja outfits approached to hold Dorothy down.

"Hiaaah!"

Dorothy's scream echoed through the flooded exhibition room.

"Stay away from them! Mudhead!"

Alice released the playing cards she was holding into the air. But they weren't just cards; they were one of Alice's strong gadgets, cards that became Trump soldiers.

"Go! Sword!" [52]

The Trumps with an emblem of a spade. They were Trump soldiers specializing in combat skills. The maximum number of them she could bring out without needing permission from the 3 Queens was 6 cards.

The cards released from Alice's hands increased in size in an instant, and the figure in it changed into that of a two-dimensional soldier.

That would be just enough if the other party were small fry. The twodimensional soldiers stood in the way of the ninjas who had come from behind Lynn, and protected Dorothy.



"Dorothy, take back your treasure!"

Right after that, Alice pressed the switch on the bracelet attached to her wrist. Along with a dazzling light, the uniform she had been wearing disappeared, and she became stark naked. However, that was but a matter of nanoseconds.

In the next moment, Alice's body was covered with a golden protective solution, then fitted with her jet black battle uniform. Alice, now on her battle style with her long whip reminiscent of a tail and the two pistols holstered on her hips, scowled at Lynn.

"From here on out, it's the extraordinary. I'll show no mercy to the enemy in front of me!"

Alice's declaration overlapped with the scream of the ninjas as they were cut and torn by the Trump soldiers.

"Eh? How come they were done for so quiickly?"

Lynn's eyes widened: even if the Tentacle Ninjas were the lowest class among the Tentacle Group, they did have one tentacle. They should be stronger that the so-called elite Russian Special Forces, that alpha troop of humans that turned out to defeated quite effortlessly.

"I already know the weakness of you guys."

In contrast with Lynn, Alice had the composure of a winner.

After all, they were fighting the Trump soldiers, wielders of those special swords. Harder than diamond, more flexible than silk. While they had the power to crush through concrete, they wouldn't damage the soft fair skin of a woman's body. They could also cut and tear through those tentacles, and those few sharp knives. There was nothing the blade of the two-dimensional Trump soldiers couldn't cut through... though its weak point was that, being thin, it was easy for it to break.

The ninjas let out a groan as their tentacles were cut and fell off them, only to crumble and fade.

"Losing your tentacles, seems to be it."

With her two guns akimbo, Alice began calmly walking towards Lynn.

"Dorothy, take back your treasure!"

Dorothy looked back, making a pause to try and understand why Alice was shouting. Just then, Alice emitted a dazzling light: she was going to do her transformation.

"I can't miss the transformation scene!"

Dorothy suddenly forgot about her own duty. The transformation system Alice's bracelet was fitted with, the "Multidimensional Storage System" to be exact, was something Dorothy had fine-tuned for Alice with the technique the Baum Foundation had originally analyzed. By storing personal equipment in a different dimension, it was a dream technology that allowed for an instantaneous change of clothes.

"I'm glad you enjoy use the present I gave you~"

With a smile, Dorothy caressed her uniform's cuff links, the ones that Alice had gifted her. She was glad to see how her partner was willing to wear what she had given her, after all. She wondered, did Alice feel the same too? It'd be nice if that was the case.

Forgetting that this was a fight, Dorothy turned her eyes to the security camera. Was Scarecrow recording the current scene as she had instructed her to? She probably was. Also, in this situation, Löwe and Lumberjack would have already made a sortie. One way or another, they couldn't have Lynn escaping.

As she thought so, Dorothy looked at Alice's appearance. A black combat uniform with excessive exposure, that showed her white underwear whenever she moved. What would happen if the other members saw this cute, stimulating costume? Would they slouch? Would they have a big nosebleed?

No, no, as if she could let such a thing happen!? Being able to enjoy Allie's sight was only a privilege for her, a Treasure Hunter the same!

As the Trump soldiers and the Tentacle Ninjas engaged in mortal combat around her, Dorothy's consciousness delved into delusion territory. And despite the fact that she remained standing right in the middle of the battlefield,

defenseless, neither the shurikens thrown by the Tentacle Ninjas nor the blade of the two-dimensional Trump soldiers touched her body.

"Kuh~~~, is this because of her ability, the Good Luck Faiiry?"

Lynn bit her lips as she watched the whole fight.

"The one to become the priestess of the Tentacle God will be Lady Lynn heeere!"

The red haired girl shouted, looking alternatively at Dorothy and Alice, and her tentacles vibrated.

"Come out, Hi-pon!"

Responding to Lynn's call, a man dressed in a hakama came jumping, crushing through the windowpane behind Alice. He landed on a table without even making a sound or even taking a step on the floor, wet after the sprinkler's discharge. As the broken glass sparkled, the man looked down on Alice and Dorothy with composure and spoke:

"Whichever of you girls would be my adversary?"

Lynn ignored Dorothy, still under delusions, and pointed at Alice.

"That oone! The black giirl!"

"Don't call me black, octopus girl!"

"Did you say octopuus!?"

"Well, you've grown tentacles and you're in red, just like an octopus, right, you octopus?"

Alice called her an octopus once and again to provoke her.

"Kiiih~~~"! It took me a hundred years to become part of the Tentacle Group, it's the first time someone calls me an octopuuus!" [53]

Lynn shouted, with a bright red face.

"Ah, now you really look like an octopus."

Hearing Dorothy's muttering, Lynn stared daggers at her.

"Hi-pon, it's okay if you leave this stupid child aloone! Please do chop up that

one to your heart's conteent!"

Winding her tentacles around the Dorchester Pot and the Spear of Kushiro, Lynn resumed her escape.

"Wait up! That's something from my house!"

Shouting, Dorothy was at a loss. Should she back Alice up, or should she chase Lynn?

"A-Allie!"

She needed to choose one of the two.

Seeing Dorothy's troubled look, Alice wasted no time and pushed her onwards.

"I'm more than enough for this opponent! Hurry up and run after that gal, Dorothy!"

Since the old days, Dorothy was a child who couldn't make decisions at critical times. And yet, she was strangely good at keeping a clear-cut attitude.

"Hurry up!"

As she gave orders, Alice looked at the clock. Two minutes had already passed since the fire alarm activated. The time they had left was less than three minutes.

"Run!"

Hearing Alice's roar, Dorothy started running. That would do just fine. The Trump soldiers were taking care of the small fry ninjas. For the moment, they were them killing one by one. Among them, the Ace card had specially done the best job, taking down three of them already.

Alice took hold of her Angra Mainyu and Aeshma, and glared at the man in the hakama. His appearance was straight out of a period drama about swordsmen. He held a white stick she hadn't seen there earlier.

"First of all, should I introduce myself?"

"There is no need for that. Gate Opener."

The man held the white stick like a sword. However, for a so-called "aiming at the eye" posture, it was a unique form that was too slanted towards the left.

[54] The length from the point of the stick to the hand was almost the same as with a sword, about a little more than 70 cm.

The part of the handle seemed to be bamboo. Or rather, Alice likened it to a stick of bamboo wrapped in white leather. Though it was the first time she had seen that weapon, it didn't seem to be too strong. Or, was there any device under the leather?

"Your humble servant is Hikita Bungoro, swordsman of Irukin---" [55]

A gunshot sounded. Alice was not so trusting as to listen to his self-introduction in silence, and her arm wouldn't miss, not within 5 meters of Hikita.

But... just by moving his body slightly, Hikita avoided the bullet.

"It is said to be common courtesy to hear one's introduction to the end."

"Too bad. I didn't learn that at school."

Hikita Bungoro. In a corner of her head, something clicked for sure: she had seen his name in some book about a selection of 100 Japanese swordsmen. [56] Still, Alice pulled the trigger of her Angra Mainyu. Unlike the Anti-demon Cross Silver bullets from the Aeshma just now, this one was loaded with Needle Flechettes. Even if he had the agility to dodge one bullet, he wouldn't be able to dodge the barrage of needles splitting into hundreds at transonic speed.

However, the moment she pulled the trigger, the spike portion for melee attacks that extended from the tip of the muzzle was struck from above with all his might, and the Needle Flechette made a huge hole on the Book Building's floor. If her teacher Faye found out, she'd spank her again.

"That's, not good." [57]

Earlier, when she looked at him, Hikita had been five meters away from her, but he was about two meters away now. To think he could dodge bullets, apparently he was a swordsman that could move faster than she pulled the trigger.

This guy doesn't do things half-assed.

Sweat flowed down Alice's back, while opposite her, he showed a relaxed smile on his face.

"Well, will you release your hidden power? Crossing swords with your current self is not interesting."

"I see you're quite underestimating me."

"I don't have the hobby of underestimating women."

"Let's find out whether it's interesting or not!"

Alice raised the Angra Mainyu and the Aeshma simultaneously, and pulled the trigger. Hikita thrusted his white stick between both of Alice's arms from below, and twisted it to the right. Due to that, Alice's right arm turned downwards, her left arm faced upwards, and she was made to waste a bullet again.

Bullets couldn't hit Hikita, even if he was in front of her. Alice switched gears immediately, and moved to attack with her daggers. The dagger of the Angra Mainyu rotated at high speed to the right, aiming at the side of her opponent's head. Twisting his body, Hikita avoided it, and the Aeshma's dagger mowed down towards his chest.

Alice Mode (Gun-and-Sword Dance): a fighting tactics specific to Alice, which consisted on unleashing her twin guns with splendid movements, as if dancing. Hikita then caught the blow with his white stick, and let the end of the stick slip under Alice's left elbow, while the dagger was still trapped there.

"Aih!?"

Alice complained, as her arm twisted the other way as a result. But since the clockwise inertia was still in motion, her whip tail was flung against Hikita with force. Hikita lowered his body to avoid it, pulled back his stick and, for the time being, took a suitable distance.

Alice bent and straightened her left arm, and subtly checking for any anomalies, she addressed him as she waited for the pain to subside.

"So what's the deal with the stick? Is it a weapon?"

With a bit of a joyful face, despite being in the middle of a fight, Hikita raised his stick and began explaining.

"This is what my master, Kamiizumi Ise-no-kami devised, something like a *shinai*. Four bamboos of 3 feet 2 inches are finely divided into eight, wrapped in a leather bag. It's a practice tool devised to exchange blows with all your strength while training." ^[58]

"You fight with a practice tool?"

"I've used this to fight for many months and years; as I have yet to experience defeat, I fail to see the problem."

Alice suddenly fired the Needle Flechette at Hikita's feet. Though it should have come as a complete surprise, Hikita turned around and avoided it this time too.

"You are a quite stubborn girl."

"I know Kamiizumi Ise-no-kami. Isn't that the Shinkage-Ryu guy? Which means, you can use Shinkage-Ryu as well?" [59]

Hikita's face immediately became sad for some reason.

"...No, I'm from the Kokage-Ryu. That's because I left the Shinkage-Ryu to Yagyu and Tokugawa." [60]

Never one to know when to quit, Alice fired the Aeshma, targeting the point he had dodged previously with the Angra Mainyu. Hikita dodged the Angra Mainyu, and repelling the Aeshma's muzzle with his shinai, he diverted the line of fire, then hammered his weapon into Alice's head.

Tap!! With a slightly goofy sound, the shinai bent against Alice's head.

"Figyah!?"

Though it hurt quite a lot, Alice was relieved her head hadn't been cracked open. The shinai was a practice tool indeed. Had he been serious, Alice would have been cut in half with the blow just now.

"Getting hit with it is painful already, but if I stab you with it, the shinai will actually pierce your body. Even for a practice tool, it's quite suitable a weapon, too."

He wasn't just bluffing. No matter what kind of rival Hikita had taken on, he

had kept winning with that shinai made of bamboo sticks. Realizing that much, Aliced turned both guns to her back, and carried out her peculiar reloading method by kicking up the hammers with the heel. Since she held the guns with both hands, she used her heel as it was quicker than cocking them with her thumbs, and since these OOPArts guns had the magazine connected to another space, the bullets would be reloaded again just by cocking them. While that virtually meant they had an infinite magazine, only 3 bullets could enter at a time through the gun's neck.

Furthermore, Alice decided to use the "Hidden power" Hikita had told her to.

"Boost On!"

Responding to Alice's will, her bodily functions increased at once. With a tightened waist, her body gradually transformed from a girl's to a beautiful goddess'.

"Oh? So this is the Boost state I heard so much about."

"I'll make it more worth your while now."

Suddenly, a rising powerful kick attacked Hikita's jaw. Somersaulting, he dodged the Needle Flechette she fired in a flash, got into a kneeling posture and took a suitable distance.

Her speed he could follow, but couldn't really react to. A certain feeling was making Hikita's swordsman's blood boil, a feeling he hadn't sensed since the last time he fought a beastman warrior.

"For the first time in a while, should I use my trump card?" [61]

Jumping in closer, Hikita released a deadly thrust that Alice dodged as if dancing aside, and then she retaliated by aiming at his heart and neck with two simultaneous attacks from her daggers in a scissors-like motion.

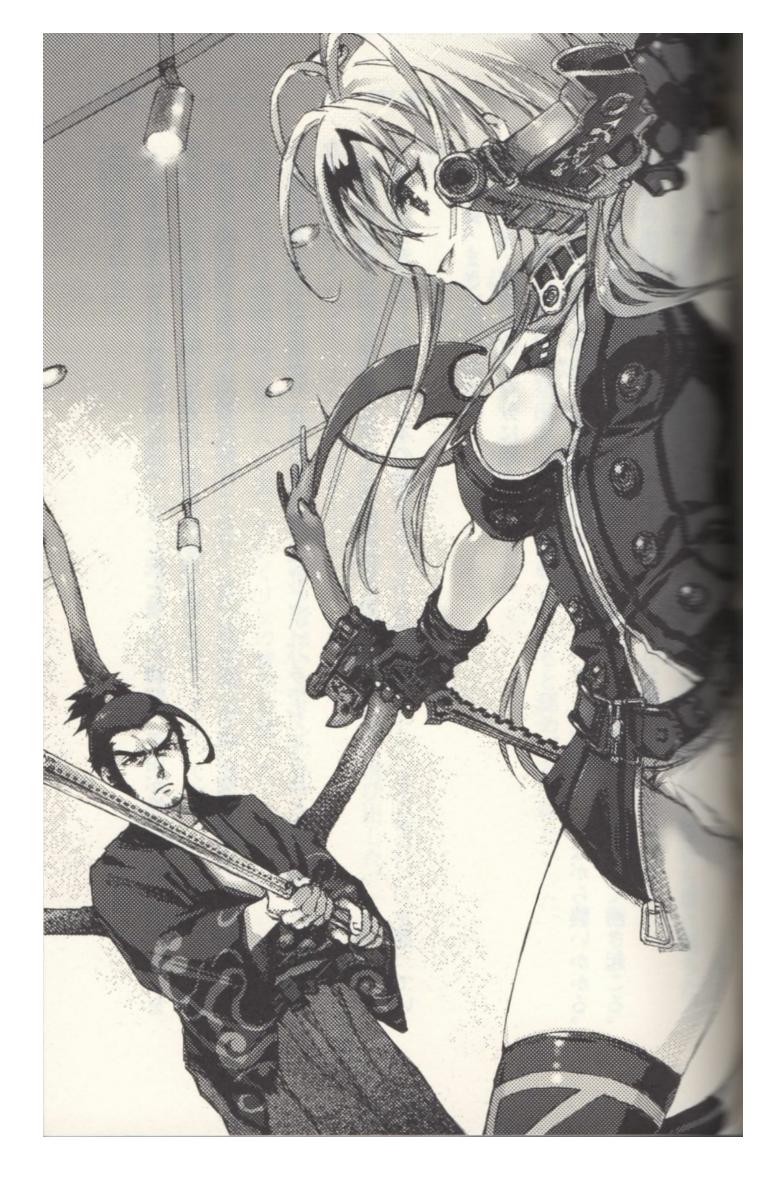
She went in at the right timing for a counter; however, the very moment she thought not even Hikita would be able to dodge it, both of Alice's hands were pushed back, and she received a crushing blow to her solar plexus.

"Are you... kidding me?"

The surprising object that the accelerated vision of Alice had captured in detail

was... 3 tentacles growing from his back at a super-high speed.

"With the tentacles the Tentacle God Irukinuf granted me, I devised a style to match the Shinkage-ryu my mentor taught me, the Tentacle God Kage-ryu." [62]



As if his words were a cue, a new battle at a super-high speed ordinary eyes couldn't follow. Alice slipped her way through the sharp stab of Hikita's shinai, and rammed with the spike of the gun's tip as a counter. Twisting her wrist, she repelled the tentacle that came to parry her dagger, suddenly bent forward as she flung back her heel, then struck Hikita on the crown of his head with it.

Hikita had caught her heel with his two tentacles however, and he tried to wrap them around Alice's legs and swing her around. Still, Alice's dagger came down towards the grabbed feet, and seeing that the muzzle was aiming at him again, Hikita tossed her away.

The moment Alice landed, she fired Needle Flechettes at Hikita's feet and 10 Anti-Demon Cross Silver bullets at his chest. He jumped right away to avoid the Flechettes, and knocked down the cross silver bullets with his shinai. However, since he couldn't move in the air, he took head-on the attack from the twin blades Alice aimed at him right then, and a spray of blood danced.

The moment Alice held her gun ready in order to respond to his attack, Hikita threw a shinai attack to her face, she rolled aside without standing to avoid it, and took a suitable distance again. The shinai had been split by the shock when he deflected the Cross Silver bullets; if she got hit now, she'd get pierced by a sharp bamboo skewer.

"You've certainly made me pull out my sword. Has it really been since that time with the Gurkhas in Shambhala?" [63]

Hikita then pulled the sword from his hip, took it in his hands, and aimed it towards her eyes. In addition to that, the three tentacles that extended from his back each held a sword now; she didn't know where they had gotten them from. His figure was the spitting image of Asura now.

"Tentacle God Shinkage-ryu, Asura Stance. Do entertain me to your heart's content."

Hikita jumped at the same time he stated so. With four blades, he attacked while delaying and stopping the timing of the edge ahead, the edge on the edge of hitting her, and the edges at his back. ^[64]

Alice violently deflected them with her guns' daggers, making high-pitched

metallic sounds as sparks flew. Had she not been in Boost state, she wouldn't have been able to react, and would have ended up split up into five pieces.

Yeah, I blocked them all!

The moment Alice felt some well-earned relief, she took a blow that felt like it was hollowing out her stomach, making her fall to her knees. One more tentacle extended from Hikita's waist.

"One does not show his trump card until the proper time." [65]

The Tentacle Swordsman, Hikita Bungoro. Alice couldn't but admit he was the strongest opponent she had fought so far in her life.

"Hurry up!"

Pressed on by Alice's voice, Dorothy ran through the hallway in pursuit of Lynn.

"Wait! You pot thief!"

"Nyufufufu. No matter where you look at, you won't find anyone who would wait when told tooo."

Going at full speed, Dorothy chased Lynn's back up the rooftop. But, her opponent was incredibly fast. She wasn't using her feet over there, but was running using the reach of her long tentacles; the distance covered by each step couldn't be compared to what a human being could achieve.

"Urkh!"

Biting her lips, Dorothy switched on her mobile.

"Scarecrow, can you hear me?"

<Yes, Milady.>

"Please tell Lumberjack to hurry towards the Book Building's roof of the St. Labels' Academy with the A equipment!"

<I've already arranged for that. His ETA is within 10 seconds.>

"As expected from you!"

<Thank you very much.>

Satisfied with Scarecrow's reply, Dorothy arrived to the rooftop in pursuit of Lynn.

"Now, I have you cornered!"

"Nyufufufu. I wonder who cornered whoo."

Along with Lynn's voice, a melody like a harp was heard. She was generating brainwashing waves by shaking her tentacles like strings. However, Dorothy's reaction wasn't the one Lynn had anticipated.

"Huuh?"

An interrogation mark appeared above Lynn's head.

"Uhihihi. You seem to be puzzled."

Seeing through Lynn's confusion, Dorothy pushed out her slim chest.

"We've already analyzed everything about those brainwashing sound waves! The visual adjustment caused by the tentacles vibration, their ability to make a person not recognize something they've seen, everything!" [66]

With sound neutralization devices fitting in her hair ornaments, Dorothy wouldn't be affected by the brainwashing waves. That was also a measure by Scarecrow.

Full of confidence, Dorothy declared as she drew near to Lynn:

"If we can analyze it, it's easy to take countermeasures!"

Dorothy smiled, and reached for her wrist bracelet. Then, she pushed a small switch.

Along with a dazzling light, her uniform changed to a battle dress that made one think of a golden angel. Just like as Alice's bracelet, it was a transformation that used a multi-dimensional storage system.

"Wha!!"

Lynn's eyes curled up.

"Ho~w shameleess~~~!"

Lynn's sight was fixed on the lower part of Dorothy's body. Compared with her back reminiscent of an angel's feather, loaded with special features, and with the solidly built structure the ankle and wrists were made of, that served as connector with Lumberjack, around the waist she was almost naked, one could even say she was defenseless there. >[67]

Then again, these were the design specifications for having a fully protected body when she united with Lumberjack, but Lynn had no way of knowing this. As a result, as far as Lynn went, it was like an exhibitionist had turned up.

"I-I don't want to be called that by someone with tentacles growing out of her!"

Dorothy rebutted with a beet red face.

<Indeed! There is nothing shameless about Milady!>

"UGAH-!"

Overlapping with Dorothy's objections, a giant in silver landed behind her, a girl with red-brown hair on his shoulder. The blast of air released by his "Air Booster" just before the landing made Dorothy's hair flutter wildly.

"Lumberjack! Let's combine!"

<Understood!>

The chest of the silver giant went wide open along with his reply.

"Löwe, distract our rival! You may even eat her!"

While jumping into the giant's chest, Dorothy issued an order to the girl riding on his shoulders.

"SHE LOOKS BAD, BUT, I'll BITE HER!"

Barking cheerfully, the girl leapt off. [68]

Before Dorothy's watching eyes, her little girl figure changed into a sexy woman's.

That girl wasn't a mere human. Beast-like hair grew on her hands and feet, sharp nails protuding from them. Glinda, Dorothy's mother and the Baum family's previous generation Treasure Hunter, had captured her in the

backwoods in Africa, and had named the human beast "Löwe" as she had lion genes. [69]

That was her. She had an astounding regenerative ability and a physical ability no human couldn't compare to; if it was her, she wouldn't falter even if she had to deal against tentacles.

"Now, while Löwe is buying some time for me..."

<Me and Milady shall become one.>

From Lumberjack's body, a female hand stretched to gently hug Dorothy, and as supple brown fingertips brushed Dorothy's lower abdomen, they grabbed the connector used for the union. ^[70]

"Auh."

At the same time Dorothy trembled, with a light numbness similar to being exposed to a small electrical current, the chest armor gradually closed. Dorothy's view turned black only for an instant, then the height of her point of view was raised significantly.

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<My body is Milady's.>
"My body is Lumberjack's."
<I'll protect you even if it costs me my life!>
"There we go!"<sup>[71]</sup>
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The silver giant's eyes shone red. That was the proof that Lumberjack, who had become Dorothy's reinforced armor for battle after being made into a cyborg by being fused with the biological metal "Roswell Metal", had released her full functionality.

"What is thiis, I never heard of iit!"

The puzzled Lynn could only wield her tentacles to try and fend off the looming beast. But, the beast didn't even try to avoid them. On the contrary, she opened her mouth wide and bit the nearest tentacle.

"CHOMP!"

Her fangs bit deeply into the tentacle.

"Gyah-! What is thiis~~~!?"

Lynn screamed at this unexpected pain and attempted to beat Löwe up with her other tentacles. Löwe quickly took her fangs off it, and evaded the tentacles by a hair's breadth.

"GAH!"

Moreover, she scratched them with her nails as she avoided them.

"Ki-h! Don't you have any manneers~?!"

Shouting in frustration before those reflexes faster than a human's, Lynn shook her tentacles and hid her figure. Merging into the surrounding space, she intended to get past them by erasing all traces of herself.

<Hahaha, do you think you could escape from the eyes of this Lumberjack?>

Speaking in a voice similar to a calm butler's due to the sound conversion, Lumberjack approached the place where Lynn had disappeared from. Then, the silver giant thrust her right hand towards Lynn.

"Uhyaah!?"

Lynn was barely able to dodge away from that crushing smash, and realized that invisibility had no effect at all against this opponent.

<You worked hard, Löwe. Leave her to me now!>

"UGAH!"

As if wanting to say she had bitten something unpleasant, Löwe spat out and stepped away.

<Now, do you intend to keep on hiding?>

Her red eyes shone. Lumberjack's eyes were comprised of multiple optical sensors and a gravitational wave perception system; she could even see through the wall of a nuclear reactor if she so wished. Dealing with an opponent who concealed her figure with that visual trick was trivial in front of this super-vision.

<Now, you'll receive your just punishment for calling Milady a pervert!> [72]

Alice watched Hikita's sword line closely as to get a clue about her possible counterattacks. Even in her Boost state, she was dodging by a hair breadth those four blades that moved freely at high speeds; she had limits on what she could parry. Besides, the one tentacle that didn't hold a sword was unexpectedly fiendish; since dealing with it had lower priority than the swords, the damage from its blows had been quietly piling up.

If their physical ability was evenly matched, Hikita had more options, so he held the advantage. Since it had come to this, she couldn't but use her last resort. The fire brigade would rush there in less than a minute too. This wasn't the time to be hesitant.

"Your hidden power turned out to be quite underwhelming."

"Hmph, it might be too early for you to tell."

"Should I make you show it to me, then? Let me see if you can match my humble sword!"

The sword of Hikita, who had put his heart and soul into attacking relying on his speed so far, attacked the blind spot of Alice's movement, destroying her timing all at once. As far as Hikita's memory went, the only person able to cope with that instant when their movement was suddenly reversed was Jubei Yagyu. If she dodged to the other side, she'd take the Tentacle God Kage-Ryu Secret Technique: Willow Crush while she side-stepped. That deadly technique, developed as it buried numerous Yagyu swordsmen in the darkness, caught up with Alice!

"Overboooost!!"

Alice shouted out.

Overboost, a further Boost that went on to increase the limits of a human's physical ability. It had a huge effect on her body. However, it also meant she had no more tricks up her sleeve now.

In response to Alice's cry, her body, her mind, her thoughts, all the elements that constituted her very self suddenly accelerated.

The world went away in an instant. The sound disappeared, and everything

around Alice stood still. For Alice's senses, it felt as if the world had stopped.

No, that isn't it. It was like time only ticked away quickly around her. She could clearly see the looming blade. Alice moved her body to avoid it.

It's hot! That was the frictional heat generated between the air and her body moving at ultra-high speed. Without her protective solution, the heat would have burnt even her very skin. However, she couldn't afford to pay attention to that now.

I have to bring it to an end by the time the Overboost expires! Alice pulled the Angra Mainyu's trigger. But, the bullet didn't come out.

No, that isn't it. It was more like Alice's movements were faster than the bullet. The moment the bullet finally came out of the muzzle, she had already overtaken it as she went ahead. She pushed forward her Angra Mainyu and Aeshma.

It's hot! Feeling an intense heat in both hands, Alice unintentionally looked at her weapons. Both of them had become red hot.

If the ammunition hadn't caused an explosion, it was because it wasn't based on gunpowder. Disregarding that completely, Alice thrusted out her guns towards Hikita.

Surprisingly, Hikita had somehow entered the world of ultra-high speed. He caught the Angra Mainyu with the sword in his hands, and two tentacles had thrown away their swords and came to do a "bare handed sword block."

Even more, he defended against the whip tail's strike Alice had unleashed with numerous entwined tentacles. And, he was starting to thrust with the remaining sword his tentacle had.

At that moment, the bullet she just shot finally caught up, and seeing as it was closing in on the middle of his forehead, Hikita cut it away with his tentacle. In a split second, Alice's knee strongly kicked his jaw, and sitting astride the fallen Hikita, she pushed both daggers against his neck.

Calculating on the spur of the moment the highs and lows of feints, the number of moves and the ultra-high speed, it was a brilliant comeback victory for Alice.

"Tentacle God Kage-Ryu Secret: Willow Crush!"

For her to only be able to move that fast, she had been a boring adversary after all. Even if she was an opponent he had deemed worthy of releasing the Willow Crush against after such a long time, he didn't think she could survive anymore after this technique.

"Farewell, Gate Ope... Gah!?"

During a fraction of a second, she had performed a tremendous offense and defense. Brought to a stop by an unexpected impact against his jaw, Hikita was slammed against the floor, and then, her sitting astride him got him pinned down. Daggers with enough heat to burn were pressed against his neck.

No matter how one looked at it, it was Hikita who had lost there. Though he had tried to match her somehow with his reflexes of a swordsman, she had used a speed he hadn't been able to follow towards the end, and he could be said to have been completely done in by the feint work of the bullets and the knee.

"Since the time I became a non-human by growing tentacles, I've been practicing with the sword for four hundred years, but it's only now that you've made me realize my own immaturity. Gate Opener, the victory goes to you. So, you should take my neck." [73]

Hikita told her with a radiant look, but then his face was suddenly showered with a golden liquid leaking from Alice's crotch.

"Buhah! Are you incontinent!?"

Alice fell down upon the head of the surprised Hikita: she had fainted as she was. Her voluptuous body shrank down in a moment.

Hikita crawled out from under Alice, and raised his sword.

"Though I lost the battle, this became my win in the end." [74]

But after wiping off the blood of his sword, he returned it to his sheath.

"A draw... how about we leave it at that?"

Hikita wiped his face, and as he rubbed his neck and chin, he watched with a slightly happy expression the sleeping Alice, still pouring away the golden water-based protective solution.

"I shall keep this figure of yours in my sights."

<Now, you'll receive your just punishment for calling Milady a pervert!>

As she talked, Lumberjack's hand flew towards Lynn.

<Boosted Knuckle!>

Literally raising flames, two fists attacked Lynn as if they were missiles.

"Hyaaah!"

Lynn screamed and ran about, trying to escape. The invisibility the tentacles had given her had accomplished nothing. Sure enough, could she actually escape while holding the pot and the spear? ... That is, could she go back alive?

<Songstress, can you hear me?>

Hikita's voice suddenly reached Lynn. It was the "Tentacle Communication", the method of communication through tentacle vibration, that only people with tentacles could hear. [75]

<What's keeping you? I want you to hurry up and come heelp!>

<Unfortunately, I can't do so. Your humble servant can't move either.>

<Eh!? Hi-pon, did you loose!?>

<One can say, we reached a draw.>

And the "Tentacle Communication" was cut off.

"Boo, Hi-pon, you're uuseless!"

Lynn spread her tentacles wide and jumped off the Book Building's roof. She had turned invisible so she wouldn't be attracting attention, but the people off the street would be able to see the silver giant and the beast child if they followed her. If they didn't intend to make a fuss, they wouldn't chase after her.

"Wait!"

As she retrieved her Boosted Knuckles, Dorothy, in control of Lumberjack, ran after Lynn. The red-haired girl had jumped off the roof into the schoolyard side, so Dorothy activated her *Air Booster*: by overpowering the wind pressure with a blast of air forward, her three-dimensional movement would be quick and nimble, and she would easily catch up with her target. However—

<Milady, the time is up.>
"I won't let you get away! Air Booster!"
<Milady!>

The voice of Scarecrow, sounding from the communication device, brought Dorothy back to her senses. Lumberjack's sensors had picked up on the fire truck approaching the school. It'd be bad if her underlings Lumberjack and Löwe were revealed to the public.

In order to avoid unnecessary hostilities due to the intimidation it could cause, Lumberjack's body was equipped with an Active Stealth function precisely for these critical situations where it could be seen.

<Milady, please withdraw.>

"Roger that. The retrieval point is?"

Löwe pointed at the school's back gate, in the corner of her view.

<I'll send a private trailer to the back gate. That way.>

Following Scarecrow's directions, Löwe casually jumped down the roof of the 4-storied Book Building, and started running towards the trailer.

"By the way, what about Allie?"

<Please rest assured, Milady. I, Scarecrow, shall protect her.>

The damage caused by the fight at the Book Building was officially filed as a gas

explosion. Since not that many students remained usually in the Book Building after school to begin with, and since it had happened after the few literature club members working there were manipulated by Lynn's brainwashing waves into going back home, there had been no human casualties. Also, since the sprinkles that had been activated were the ones at the corridor and at the librarian room that the literature club had made into the exhibition room, the damages had been kept to a minimum, as the book collection area and the entrance hall hadn't been affected. Or maybe one could say that was part of Scarecrow's strategy as well.

After reaching a draw in her battle with the Tentacle Swordsman Hikita Bungoro, Alice escaped the Book Building with the help from Scarecrow, Dorothy's underling, who had rushed there to take control of the situation. Though she turned back to her school uniform using the conversion function from her bracelet, for some reason her underwear had gotten wet by the excessive supply of the protective solution, and now she was placed into the situation of having to go home in such an unpleasant state...

"Haa... I want to hurry back home."

Alice muttered with a sigh on the backseat of the limousine driven by March Hare. She was stripping off her underwear, as going commando was better than remaining wet.

"Meow-. If there was a party, I'd rather you invited March Hare, meow."

March Hare kept driving as she complained in jealousy, swinging her rabbit ears.

"Hey now, you're a rabbit, you can't end your sentences with "meow"."

"Well, I'll use "rabbit" then, rabbit." [76]

Alice gave a big sigh. Couldn't March Hare's intelligence be raised a bit more? Not at Hatter's level though, but she had always had wanted to make something about her homunculus' mind being like a flower garden all the time.

"By the way, Profeshor?"

"Whaat? Oh incidentally, since I'm in a bad mood right now, I'll chew you out if you say anything silly. Yeah, so strongly, your ears will fly off."

March Hare's ears hanged down with a whoosh.

"Err, Profeshor, were you with Löwe today, pyon?"

"No. I met Scarecrow, I didn't meet the others."

"Is that so~? Then it's okay, rabbit."

March Hare was awfully afraid of that underling of Dorothy called Löwe. It was probably because Löwe was a human beast of the lion type, while March Hare was a rabbit type.

"Don't you get along with her?"

"More than not getting along, it seems set in stone that she's my natural enemy, pyon."

When her mother had made the artificial life forms of March Hare and the others, she seemed like she wanted to arrange some limitations to prevent a revolt; apparently this was one of the parameters she had implemented.

"Well, she's not here for the time being, but I'll protect you if we meet her."

"Thank you, rabbit-."

"By the way, have we found any new information about the Gate? Did you hear if Hatter has made some progress?"

"Profeshor~?"

"Nh?"

"Profeshor, did you order Hatter to investigate the Gate?"

"...Ah."

Artificial life forms only performed basically what they were ordered to. Phrases like "It was implied in what you said" and "I'll naturally assume so, even if you don't tell me", those only came from humans' awareness of the circumstances. Without an order from Alice, Hatter would only be investigating again about Irukinuf and the invisible tentacles.

Mom... Why hadn't you arranged for a human friend? Alice felt a bit like crying. But it wasn't like she was depressed right now. Although Dorothy's subordinates were excellent, they had to take a rest, unlike the artificial life

forms. At least, regarding that, she came out in top.

It'd be good enough if she issued her order after coming back... that was her only consolation. She was seized by an unusually shy thought. Saying that she had tied with Hikita, while in reality he had taken pity on her, made Alice lose a bit of confidence.

"When I get back, I have to arrange preparations at once."

Due to the uproar from today's gas explosion, the academy would be closed for a while. In the meantime, she had to settle the matters involving Irukinuf.

The great hall of the Baum house.

Without even changing her uniform, Dorothy groggily lied down in the sofa and became engrossed in watching the ceiling.

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"Aah", I give in."
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After managing to lure their opponent, it had ended in a disastrous result when that girl with tentacles had actually been able to escape while successfully stealing her treasures. No matter how optimistic Dorothy was, it was impossible not to get depressed.

"And I wanted to show my good side to Allie too..."

Löwe, who had returned to her girl form, came and rubbed her soft cheeks against Dorothy to comfort her.

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"GAU..."
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"Thanks, Löwe."

As Dorothy patted her neck, her eyes turned to the slender maid. When one mentioned a maid with a tall, slender body, there was only one in the Baum house.

"Milady, is it ok to be that discouraged?"

Saying so with a smile, Scarecrow pressed a switch in her hand. A map of the Earth emerged on the great hall's ceiling.

"What would this be?"

"It's a map showing the location of the members from the Irukinuf's clan. I call it the Irukinuf Sensor."

As she talked, Scarecrow pushed the switch again. Red spots were projected everywhere around the world.

"So many?"

"Yes. If we trust the Sensor's performance, there are probably around ten thousand people throughout the world."

Ten thousand... Dorothy felt dizzy hearing that number, despite it having been dropped that casually.

"If it's just those where a reaction appears without narrowing down the requirements, it could reach up to 3 billion."

If it came to 3 billion, that'd be a number equal to half of mankind.

"So we really wouldn't be able to tell."

"Yes. So, I ignored the weak reactions. As a result, the spot that reacts the strongest is here."

Doing a close-up on a center of the map projected onto the ceiling, Scarecrow moved her pointer to one place in particular.

"Even if I match it against all the circulating maps, no island exists in this location in the South Pacific. There has been only one map describing this place in the past."

"I know! It's the Piri Reis Map." [77]

"As expected from Milady, you are correct."

That was an ancient map that the Ottoman Navy Admiral Piri made in the 16th century. It depicted the coastline of the Antarctica, undiscovered at the time, and the mountain range, its altitude, etc, under the ice sheet, that would only be confirmed by sonar on 1956. The map also depicted distortions of the terrain one could only recognize after observing the place from a substratospheric altitude.

When the Admiral Piri made this map, he wrote that he had taken 20 old maps as reference, so it brought up the debate of whether there was a civilization advanced enough in the ancient times as to take measurements from the skies.

"Perhaps, this would be the stronghold of the Irukinuf clan."

"What's the basis behind that?"

"Milady, the reaction we got from the thief that took the Pot and the Spear was heading there."

Dorothy rose up, her clothes flapping. This really wasn't a situation where she could keep feeling down.

"Start up the Twister! I'll beat Allie at getting to the Irukinuf cult!"

It was her chance to boast to Alice after today's blunder.

"Affirmative, Milady."

Scarecrow began preparing immediately after Dorothy's instructions.

This text is a machine translation (MTL).

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.



This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

Chapter 4: Tentacle God's Island

An egg-shaped aircraft descended slowly under the moonlight. The aircraft wasn't too big, just about 2 meters in diameter.

Its destination, a small island with no illumination. A lost island that didn't appear in any maps, either. It was the Tentacle God's Island: the headquarters of the Tentacle Group, those who had obtained the power of Irukinuf.

Without making a sound, the aircraft slipped through between the huge stone buildings buried in the jungle of tropical plants, then landed in front of the temple located in the center of the island.

An egg-shaped shadow stretched on the stone paving. Making a small vibrating *buzz*, a crack ran from the top to the bottom of the aircraft. When the crack reached the bottom, the aircraft broke with a *snap*, and a redheaded girl holding a jar and a spear-like metal bar made her appearance from within.

"Nyufufu, I safely made iit." [78]

The singing-like voice echoed through the temple illuminated by the moonlight. She was Lynn, the Irukinuf's Songstress that had fought at the Book Building of St. Label's Academy against Alice and the others.

Making a coy face like a cat^[79], she stroked the surface of the aircraft with the tentacles that extended from her waist. Making a clacking sound, the aircraft quickly folded up into a size enough for it to fit in her pocket.

Using this portable ultra high-speed aircraft, Lynn was able to freely jump to any place around the world. No matter if she had to go to the Tentacle God's Island from Moscow, or from the island to St. Label's Academy, those kinds of travels around the globe were no trouble thanks to this aircraft.

[&]quot;Nyufufuh."

Laughing contentedly, she looked up at the temple, and quietly inhaled a deep breath.

"Lord Tentacle Kiing? I retrieved Lord Irukinuf's treasure."

Being in the middle of the night as it was, the redhead's voice could be heard throughout the temple.

"The jar and the laance. Both of theem! Quite the achievemeent."

Lynn touted about the treasures she was holding, and ran up the stairs that extended towards the centre of the temple. In one go, she leapt into the central part, where 12 entasis pillars stood in a row.

"Nyufufufufu."

Feeling the gaze of many directed towards the treasures she held, Lynn's face broke into a superiority smug.

The Dorchester Pot and the Kushiro Spear. She had snatched both away from Alice and company, and right in front of their noses. There was no precedent of someone in the Tentacle Group bringing back 3 treasures from Irukinuf's fission in such a short time. [80]

The Tentacle King Swodar should now acknowledge her more than ever. Just thinking of the power she might receive in exchange for the treasures, Lynn lightly jiggled her chest as she walked.

"Nyafuh!?"

Suddenly, Lynn tripped, and as she almost fell down, the treasures rolled down from her hands.

"Aah!"

In a panic, Lynn extended her tentacles, trying to grab the treasures. But, beyond a certain point, the tentacles stopped as if they were being repelled.

"Tentacle... King?"

Lynn turned her gaze towards the throne, puzzled.

There was a distance of 10 meters from where she was standing now to the throne, the same position she was asked to remain at on the last audience.

In front of Lynn, the Tentacle King remained in silence, sitting on the temple's throne, not even bothering to look at the girl. On the contrary; he seemed to be indifferent even towards the treasures that rolled down before the throne.

So far, whenever someone managed to bring back treasures, they would carry out the actions to insert them into Irukinuf at once. But, neither the Tentacle King nor Irukinuf at his hand showed any intentions of doing that.

"Tentacle King, here are the treasuures. They're what we need to complete Lord Irukinuf's bodyy."

Lynn raised her voice deliberately. And yet, the Tentacle King didn't even open his eyelids.

"Tentacle King?"

She was shouting now. In order for her voice to get through, Lynn shouted with all her strength.

"Songstress. Whatever happened with inviting those guests?"

Blocking out Lynn's shouts, a throaty man's voice sounded from an entasis pillar, taking over for the Tentacle King.

"I won't let you say you forgot."

The Great Tentacle Leonidas, who took care of the island's defense, showed up from the darkness, flexing his strong pectorals.

"What "guests" are you talking abouut?"

Lynn feigned ignorance.

"It's high time you quit deceiving us, Songstress!"

Leonidas thrust the iron spear in his hand at Lynn's chest.

"Hiih!?"

Affected by Leonidas' outburst, Lynn let out a short shriek.

As if on cue, a bonfire was lit on each of the 12 big pillars, and the remaining of the 12 Apostles appeared.

Naturally, that didn't mean they all had assembled there. Several of the bodies

looked transparent under the moonlight, and didn't they cast a shadow over the stone pavement either; they were stereoscopic images.

"The Songstress has the seed of rebellion in her!"

"The Songstress goes against the wishes of the Tentacle King!"

"She did bring the treasures, but even so, opposing the Tentacle King is a serious crime!"

"It's clear she tried to kill the Gate Opener using Hikita Bungoro, if I may be so bold to suggest!"

Lynn groaned softly before the pressure emanated by the tentacles of the 12 Apostles.

Being as they were the Apostles, they had power enough to intimidate underlings, no matter if those were stereoscopic images with no substance. If this was one who wasn't a follower of Irukinuf, wielding the same tentacles, they'd faint before that heavy pressure; people with a weak heart would probably even get a heart attack.

"Now, would you answer!"

Leonidas' eyes shone gold, filled with bloodlust.

"T-Thaat's..."

Lynn's knees shook in panic. Her face stiffened, her throat dried. Should she tell them, or should she deceive them?

An Irukinuf Priestess^[81] was an existence that even surpassed the Tentacle King, an immortal figure united with Irukinuf. Lynn believed that she had the qualifications to become a priestess herself. That was the reason why she had been collecting treasures.

"Do you think we wouldn't be able to see through the ambitions of a lass like yourself?"

As if piercing through Lynn's chest, Leonidas' spearhead jolted her solar plexus.

"In the 2500 years I've been a follower of Irukinuf, I've seen my fair share of people of your ilk!"[82]

His spearhead bit into her. If he added a bit more strength, the iron spear would break through her chest and pierce her heart.

Lynn tightly closed her eyes in fear.

"Can you leave it at this? Sir Leonidas." [83]

That unexpected, timely help made Lynn's face shine brightly.

"Mh?"

A long and narrow tentacle twined around Leonidas' iron spear. For someone to stop the movements of one of the 12 Apostles, it could only be one amongst their midst, or the Tentacle King.

"Do you intend to interfere?"

"No, that is not my intention."

Yue Ying had been silently watching over the situation with the other Apostles and Lynn, but now took action and pulled back Leonidas' spear with the long tentacle that extended from her shoulder.

"The visitors the Tentacle King called for are approaching. I think we should give priority to welcoming those girls here, what do you think?"

Hearing Yue Ying's words, Leonidas looked up at the night sky.

One of the various benefits provided by the tentacles was a strengthening of the physical capabilities. If it was a Great Tentacle, their body entrusted with eight tentacles, it was no trouble to stare at the flapping wings of a mosquito flying under the moonlight.

And Leonidas' eyes noticed well enough the reverse cone-like object approaching the island. It was the mobile device Twister, one of the heritages the Baum house owned.

"Hmm... luck's on your side, Songstress."

"We'll leave it to you to meet the visitors, Sir Leonidas, so how about we order the Songstress to undergo punishment for a while?"

The 12 Apostles looked at each other. Yue Ying's proposal was reasonable, but should they be deciding how to treat the Songstress by themselves? At a loss,

they turned their eyes to the Tentacle King, who was calmly watching them on his throne.

"King, your decision!"

Hearing the 12 Apostles' voice, a rainbow-colored eye slowly appeared from the tip of the staff in the Tentacle King's hands.

<I have seen it allIII.>

Irukinuf's voice reverberated inside the mind of all the followers present in the island.

"Your judgment!"

In one voice, the 12 Apostles asked for the Tentacle King's reply.

"We do agree she should receive a punishment. Thus, We respect Yue Ying's decision."

The Tentacle King finally replied to their request, his voice reverberating. The eyes of both the Tentacle King Swodar Nyarmain and Irukinuf stared at Lynn as if they intended to bore a hole through her.

The 12 Apostles waited with bated breath for the Tentacle King to continue.

"Spending the night in the Room of Meandering Beasts should be good."

The Tentacle King announced the Songstress' punishment in a tone devoid of emotion, only declaring the decision aloud.

"Hih!"

Hearing the name of the very punishment chamber that made the beings with tentacles feel like hell on earth, Lynn couldn't help but give a short whine.

"Cool down for a while, Songstress."

The moment the Tentacle King moved his finger, a huge hole appeared under Lynn's feet. Lynn's body floated in midair, becoming weightless.

"Eh?"

But it was just for an instant. Faster than a blink, Lynn was sucked into the hole.

Her destination, the Room of Meandering Beasts.

"Hyaaaaaaaaaah!"

All that remained from her were her screams from deep inside the hole.

"My Apostles. Go meet the two priestesses... Do treat them politely."

Both the Tentacle King and Irukinuf closed their eyes.

And so, 12 Apostles spread out soundlessly, in order to carry out the orders from the Tentacle King.

Altitude: 300,000 meters. The Vimana was flying under suborbital flight at a height similar to a man-made satellite. With this way of flying using the Earth's gravity, the Vimana could reach anywhere on Earth within an hour.

Alice and Hatter were at the gondola-shaped bridge installed in the Vimana's lower part. As a result of the free fall, the aircraft was in a weightless state, and so Alice's hair floated in an unnatural form.

"Caught up with them yet?"

Alice, sitting down on the commander's seat placed in the backward center of the bridge, called out to Hatter, sitting on the forward cockpit.

"We accurately pinpointed the Twister's location. We'll be able to overtake them 290 seconds from now."

Hatter answered Alice's question dispassionately, pointing at the luminous points on the screen, that displayed the Vimana's and the Twister's current positions, as a visual cue.

"Ookay, despite our late start, we caught up real quick."

"If you consider both ships' fuselage specs, you'll realize we're going over their maximum speed. Besides, since Lady Dorothy is on board, the Twister is prioritizing safety rather than speed."

Alice nodded at Hatter's remark. Unlike the Baum house and their esteemed Milady, Hatter and the others didn't adjust their speed even with Alice riding along. Alice was quite comfortable with such a professional, even if slightly cold, arrangement.

"Kishishishi, that Mudhead intended to jump the gun on me; I'll have her realize things seldom go as one wishes."

With these words, Alice gazed at the screen in front of her. It displayed a red luminous point, their target, the Twister.

It overlapped with the reaction of the transmitters Alice had attached to Dorothy. All the presents Alice had given Dorothy, like uniform's cuff links and pendants, were fitted with transmitters without exception.

They were actually friends at school, but since she was a rival Treasure Hunter, Alice could show no openings.

Take advantage of the time of peace to make your preparations.

That was one of the teachings Alice's mother had left her.

"Say, Hatter, did you find anything new about the Gate?"

Alice asked, turning her eyes from the screen to Hatter.

"Yes. I found that the Gates can be broadly divided into 3 types of variations."

"3 types?"

"Gates that let you travel through space; Gates that let you travel through time; and, the existence called "Queen's Gate" that oversees them all. I still don't know all the details, only that most of the ones Lady Lewis discovered were the space-Gate type."

Hearing Hatter's words, something flared up in Alice's mind.

"Travel through space, you say? Would you be able to do that by keeping things in a different space without moving them...?"

Wasn't the multi-dimension storage system offered by Dorothy already complete? That would mean...

"There is a high chance the Baum house owns technology related to space

Gates. However, what Lady Lewis seeked wasn't such an incomplete item. She was looking for the Queen's Gate, the all-purpose gate connected to all Gates, transcending space and time."

After Hatter addressed her doubts, Alice turned her sight back to the Vimana's control panel.

"I see. Then, did Mom have an educated guess of where the Queen's Gate could be?"

"Do you want to see the list?"

"Display it."

Hatter slightly moved her finger, and a list was projected in a screen floating in front of Alice.

"Lewis' List" could be called the crib notes of the Dodgson Foundation, the document that detailed all the records and traditions that existed on Earth and the investigations about the treasures' whereabouts.

Though Alice scanned the list with expectation, her expression soon lost its brightness.

"I already saw this the other day, at the mansion's underground."

Alice told Hatter with a sigh.

"The list concerning the Gates is the only thing we have left."

Hatter's words were deprived of emotion. Her words only informed of the truth, indifferently.

Oh well...

Alice swallowed up her frustration. They should be able to catch up with the Twister soon. The discussions regarding the list could be left for later.

Anticipating the moment the weightlessness would be cancelled, the girl checked the seatbelts on the commander's seat.

"When we get close, I'll leave in the Attack Device."

On board the Twister and its perfect inertial control, no unpleasant acceleration could be felt, regardless of what kind of speeds it reached or sharp turns it took.

Three silhouettes were inside the Twister's control room. The floor surface there consisted of a large screen panel.

"It's been a while since I was able to forestall Allie this much."

Looking at the image of the current situation projected under her eyes, Dorothy smiled, seemingly satisfied.

The giant Lumberjack, reminiscent of a silver armor, and the beast girl Löwe, moving her ears with a *blip blop*, both waited their turn behind Dorothy.

"Milady, please pay attention, we'll project the image of our survey of the whole island."

Following Scarecrow's voice, a monochromatic stereoscopic vision imitating the island's shape rose from under Dorothy.

"Though it's visible with the naked eye, that island has a strange camouflage that prevents it from being reflected through lens. That's why, even though I managed to create an image somehow through various means, there is no color; do forgive me."

"This is..."

Dorothy's breath was taken away.

The form of the island was too geometrical.

"Even if this is just me talking from the scan results, this would be a man-made island, that also floats over the sea. The entire island is composed of a huge stone arrangement, which made it gain buoyancy by some method I can't quite figure out."

"Somehow, it's like an amazing version of Nan Madol, right?" [84]

Nan Madol, a gigantic stone structure submerged by the Pohnpei Island's

coast. The islands of Micronesia had countless structures of unknown origin. This was now the proof that an extinct megalithic civilization had indeed existed. Though all those others were genuine, compared to this under their eyes, those structures didn't go beyond mere rockwork.

"Perhaps, this might be the original."

Scarecrow's musings about history's mysteries were cut off by the emergency siren.

"What's that!?"

The moment Dorothy half-rose from the sofa, the video and lighting in the room were killed, and her body was hurled up into the air.

"Eh?"

Right after the unexpected gravity-free state registered in their minds, they noticed a large hole that had been suddenly created on the control room's wall.

The jet-black night sky was visible on the other side of the hole. The altitude of Twister's flight was currently 6000 meters. So, if a hole opened up...

Before she could even perish the thought, Dorothy's body was sucked out into the empty sky due to the difference in atmospheric pressure.^[85]

At once, Twister's silhouette faded away in the distance.

"Hiiyaaaaaaaaah!"

Dorothy screamt, on a freedive without a parachute.

With no time to lose, she spread her body to gain air resistance and reduce her fall velocity, but the change was but a drop in a bucket.

<Milady-!!>

Lumberjack didn't hesitate. Engaging the Air Booster on her back at full throttle, she chased after Dorothy.

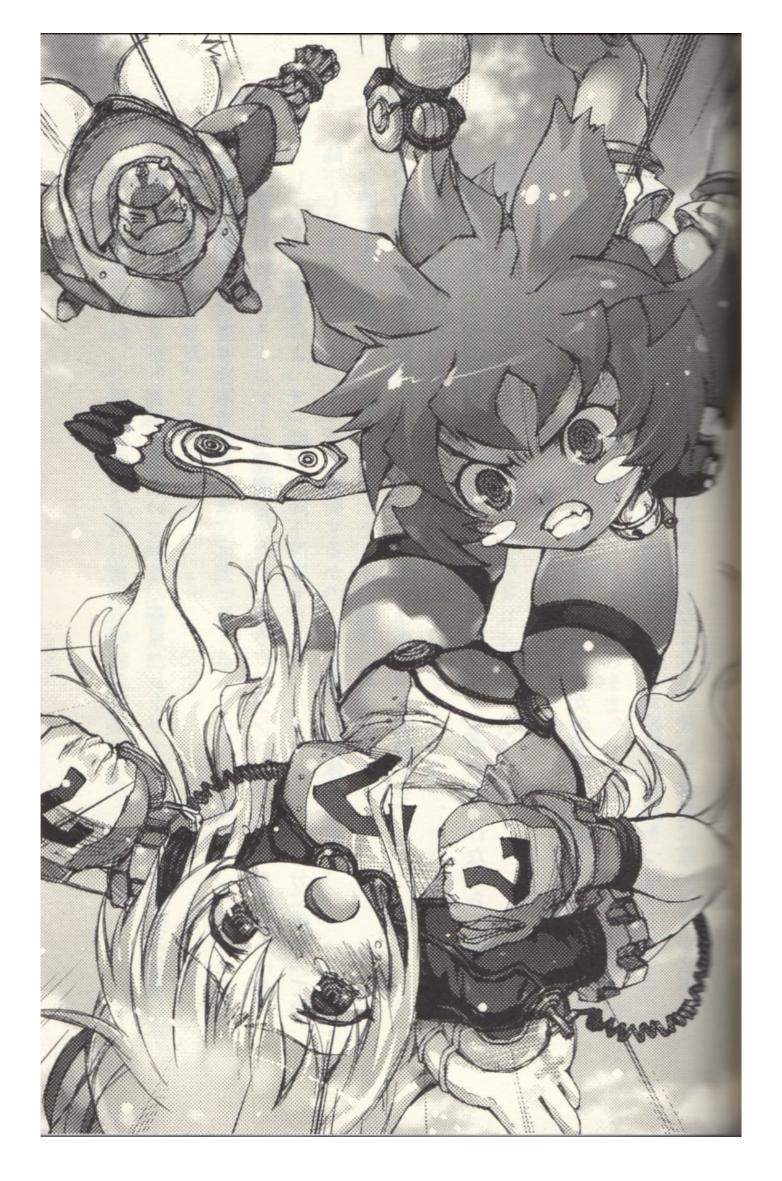
"Lumberjack! Come! Hurryyy-!"

Dorothy shouted for Lumberjack, who was going towards her at a breakneck speed.

Free-diving from an altitude of 6000 meters, her body temperature was rapidly dropping. In a corner of her eye, she saw the Twister descend as its airframe bent from the attacks it was receiving.

"LET'S GO!"

In an instant, Löwe jumped at Lumberjack's leg, went around her shoulder, then used her as a scaffold to leap vigorously at Dorothy.



Diving head first, she went past Dorothy then turned around.

<Löwee! Milady!>

Lumberjack opened up her armored chest to catch Dorothy. The air resistance rapidly increased, and the difference in altitude between Dorothy and Lumberjack increased.

"TEIYAAH!!"

Löwe kicked Dorothy up to fill the gap between Lumberjack and the girl.

"Gyafuh!"

Due to the intense shock, the air in the blonde girl's lungs was expelled out.

Lumberjack, with her extended armored chest, spread both arms to hug Dorothy tightly.

"I LEAVE HER TO YOU NOW!"

As a result, Löwe's fall velocity accelerated further. She was at an altitude of around 3000 meters now. Generally, that'd be a height where one would get helplessly smashed against the ground, but if it was Löwe, the human beast, she should be able to make it just barely.

"I GO AHEAD."

Seeing Lumberjack catching up with Dorothy, Löwe gave a smile, and fell into the sea.

<Milaady, mid-air combination!>

Lumberjack called out to the almost fainting Dorothy, to make her keep her consciousness.

After being kicked by Löwe, Dorothy's falling speed became zero just for a moment, and aligned herself with Lumberjack, who nosedived at her with a momentum that made one think they'd crash against each other.

<Milaady!!>

Catching Dorothy in midair, Lumberjack closed the armor. Even if worse came to worst, she'd be safe there. Hugging Dorothy's body inside her, Lumberjack gave a sigh of relief as she activated a reverse thrust.

"What happened, Scarecrow!?"

Having completed the combination with Lumberjack, Dorothy asked Scarecrow through her communication device.

<We were attacked. I must do an emergency landing. Milady, be careful...>

An intense noise in the middle of the communication made it impossible to hear all the words, and then a dazzling light spread in the night sky.

With that flash of light reminiscent of a nuclear explosion, Lumberjack's sensors whited out. The feed from the outside stopped, her field of vision became now pure white, and her body stopped moving.

"Scarecrow!"

Dorothy shouted inside Lumberjack, who had stopped functioning. They'd soon crash into the sea. It didn't matter if Lumberjack was made of Roswell Metal, she wouldn't be able to absorb the whole shock.

Dorothy closed her eyes, clenched her teeth, and braced for the impact.

The dazzling light that changed the night sky into midday's disappeared, plunging the island back into silence.

"You're playing around too much, Rama."

The Tentacle King muttered under his breath, and turned his gaze from the night sky to the ground again.

Before his eyes, there was a young beauty wearing a Chinese dress. It was the Apostle Yue Ying, the woman tasked with adjusting the Gate.

"Since he's a Prince, he wants to show off with those techniques every once in a while."

Among the 12 Apostles, Rama was the leader, also called the oldest in the Tentacle Group.

As he had lived in the golden age of civilization before the modern one formed, he was one of the precious long-lived beings amongst their ranks.

"That ability of his, it's so difficult to use..."

The light bullet Rama had released was one kind of nuclear fusion. If he so wished, he could level a city on his own. Because it was too powerful, it was known amongst the Apostles as a power not to be used.

"Still, from all the attacks he could have used, that seemed to be one which would weaken them the most."

"He was being considerate as a Prince."

The Tentacle King was astonished at how skillfully he controlled a technique that could evaporate the whole island if misused.

"However, he's not supposed to injure our important Priestess."

"Sir Leonidas is on his way. Do not fret."

The Tentacle King calmly nodded at Yue Ying's words.

"Then, Yue Ying. You're to go underground, hurry and prepare the Gate. The "Gate Opener" shall arrive soon. The time to save the world from the crisis has finally come."

As he gave his commands, the Tentacle King stroked Irukinuf in his hand. After taking in the Jar and the Spear, Irukinuf was one step closer to its perfect body. Then it'd only need a Priestess to guard it.

"What is... that?"

Alice had well begun to prepare the attack device "White Rabbit" in the Vimana's lower hangar, when she saw the feed from outside and groaned involuntarily.

20% of the Twister had disappeared abruptly, and huge flashing lights were attacking it continuously.

The Twister's surface was coated with an unknown material: it wouldn't melt even at a temperature of 3000 degrees, and it was said to be able to withstand any and all shocks.

So, for an attack to damage it to that extent--

Alice stopped pondering about it, quickly got into the White Rabbit, and affixed her harness.

"Hatter, impact-resistant position, now!"

The shockwave reached not long after, the Vimana swinging around like a leaf fluttering in a storm.

If it was a normal aircraft, there was no way they could have avoided crashing. The Vimana made full of the inertial control system installed in various parts of its fuselage, and kept its horizontality automatically.

Although it didn't compare to the perfect inertial control of the Twister, that emphasized comfort on the rides, it was thanks to this system that Vimana had a mobile performance several orders of magnitude above that of a normal aircraft.

<Professor, are you okay?>

Hatter's voice sounded via the White Rabbit's communication device.

"I'm fine over here. What about the Twister?"

<It's descending onto the island, trying to control its attitude.>

"Can you identify the weapons that damaged the Twister?"

<The first attack on it was one that made substances disappear due to a micro black hole by using nuclear fusion. The second, according to our assessment, was pure nuclear fusion without residual radioactivity. The target was destroyed by a shockwave created by the pressure expansion and the high temperature."</p>

Hatter casually asserted.

"Is such a thing even possible?"

<Though it's not possible with current technology, it's been confirmed that there were civilizations in the past that could. It's described in the Mahabharata and Ramayana of the ancient India, I can confirm signs of damage due to high heat at the ruins down below.>[86]

"In other words, there are people in that island who can use such weapons."

Alice got excited. Over there, there were enemies who were making full use of legendary prehistory civilization technology.

The Queen's Gate my mother pursued might also be there as well. And above all else, it's very likely that I'll find there Swodar Nyarmain, who was in contact with her, and is now involved with the Gate. It's a worthy challenge.

"Wait here with the Vimana. I'll make a sortie with the White Rabbit."

The 3 Queens had granted them permission to investigate the Twister's remains.

Without hesitation, Alice loaded all her available equipment into the White Rabbit. Namely, her inertial control system, the Angra Mainyu, the Aeshma and her whip. And it went without saying, she didn't forget spare protective solution, in case of an emergency. She stuffed all this equipment, along with her combat uniform, into the hyperspace storage system.

This system from the Baum Foundation, that reduced the weight of up to 200 kilograms to zero, had proved to be quite useful. Though she also wanted to bring 54 full sets of Trump soldiers if she could, unfortunately she had overused them lately and didn't have the time to refill them.

Her whole body now clad into a diver suit to protect her bodily functions of her whole body, Alice straddled the White Rabbit.

"Start the countdown."

For the strategy this time, the White Rabbit was equipped with a rocket booster and a controllable thruster. In its ultra high-speed setting, it could reach the island they could now see on the horizon in 3 minutes.

<Grumble, Profeshor, March Hare wants to go too, pyon>

March Hare wedged herself into the transmission. Yet, Alice had finished her preparations to leave with the Attack Device already.

"Denied!"

Alice rejected March Hare's request in a flash.

<Au~, why would you~>

"You're the trump card if push comes to shove! If you don't hear from me in 30 minutes, you head straight to my transmitter's location, no questions asked, understand?"

<Acknowledged, bunny->

"Hatter, start countdown! From five!"

<Roger. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0>

At the same time the countdown ended, the hangar's floor opened up, and the White Rabbit was released into the black void.

Alice expertly directed the White Rabbit's nose towards the island and switched the rocket booster on. With a deafening roar, it flew her towards the island like a white bullet.

The island was back in silence.

On one of its edges were the burly body of a great hero and a slender body of a young man with a darkish skin.

The features of the young man made him handsome, from his manners drifted a graceful elegance. The youth had an overwhelming presence about him different than the intimidating air from the great hero.

At their feet, there were two people who none of that imposing presence, that they had pulled up from the sea: a fainted reddish-brown haired girl, and a silvery giant who had stopped functioning. In other words, Dorothy's subordinates, Löwe and Lumberjack. Though they had fallen into the sea from an altitude of 600 m, they were somehow still alive.

"Did you see that, Leonidas?"

Asking so, the youth with dark skin brought back into his body the tentacles

that extended from his shoulder. Once he fully retracted his tentacles, there was no way to tell he belonged to the Tentacle Group.

"I did see, Prince Rama."

After prying open the chest part of the giant, and pulling over his shoulders the defenseless, knocked out blonde girl with the exposed lower half, Leonidas looked beyond the sea.

The eyes of those two, watching under the moonlight, caught the figure of the aircraft flying around the island near the horizon.

"A Vimana... there are still some that can fly."

Rama muttered, overcome with nostalgia.

"Do we shoot it down?"

Leonidas asked Rama courteously. For Leonidas, who held the hierarchy in high regard, Rama was the one he respected after the Tentacle King; he wasn't considered the oldest in the Tentacle Group for nothing.

"Let's refrain from doing so."

Rama smiled graciously.

"It made Us get nostalgic, We can't bring ourselves to damage such a beautiful aircraft." [87]

The same man who had just shot down the Twister as it approached the island now shook his hands, that remained flickering after shooting light for the first time in a while, and put on the jacket he had tied to his waist.

"Besides... one should pay respect to those who live in the "Golden Age"." [88]

As Rama and Leonidas stared, a small light separated from the Vimana, and turned towards them.

"It appears they're coming from over there."

Leonidas stared intently at the luminous point. It approached low so as to graze the sea surface.

"We shall withdraw. Do as you see fit."

"Leave it to me."

Leonidas sank one knee into the ground and hang down his head.

"Take it easy. After all, they're the Tentacle King's guests."

Putting both hands into his pockets, Rama disappeared deep inside the jungle.

The White Rabbit Alice was riding on accelerated due to the rocket booster, at a super-low altitude close to the sea surface.

"Remaining flight time, 2 more minutes..."

To compensate for the explosive acceleration force, the rocket booster's combustion time was very short.

Though she usually utilized the ultra-small turbofan engine to maneuver during these times, she couldn't do so this time. The enemy's attack power being as abnormal as it was, she had to move quickly so as to not become a sitting duck.

"One more minute."

Looking at the counter, Alice reconfirmed the Twister's crash point on the map. The only thing remaining was using the free surface effect to gain some lifting power, and it'd be over. [89]

As she finally approached the island, Alice turned off the booster, operated the variable thrusters on the aircraft's lower half, and rose slightly at the same time she landed.

Jumping over the jungle covering the island, she approached the crash point.

Indeed, the reaction from the transmitter she had given Dorothy pointed to the same place. The shape of the Twister airship came into view from the other side of the mowed down trees.

"Uwaa, how awful."

As soon as she saw the fallen Twister through her night vision goggles, Alice let

out a lamenting sigh.

The Twister, that used to have a reverse cone shape, had lost its lower part. On its hull, there was a large hole that looked as if it had been gnawed on.

"No thermal reaction from the cut-out surface, nor any residual radioactivity..."

Checking the information sent from the external sensors, Alice deployed the landing legs of the White Rabbit.

The exterior cowl with an almond-shaped form opened, and landing legs reminiscent of an ostrich firmly stepped on the ground.

By changing from Flight Mode to Walk Mode, not only she could save fuel, it also made it possible for her to travel through uneven places like that jungle.

According to the external sensors, the temperature of the Twister's fuselage wasn't very high. In that case, she didn't need to worry about a fire. She wouldn't be saying the same if it was the Vimana.

In the unlikely event her airship crashed, it had a working defense mechanism to eliminate a third party's invasion if repairs were possible, or to self-destruct if they weren't.

On the other hand, the Twister didn't feature such defense systems. It was designed in concordance with the Baum family's values, that considered the passenger's rescue higher priority than security protection.

Alice approached the Twister with that White Rabbit which had grown ostrich legs, and plunged its nose into the hole by its side.

"Now, I wonder if they're safe."

Alice jumped down from the device, looked round the area, and began navigating the Twister. She was relying on her memory from when she rode on it to Russia the other day, while also considering the transmitter's reaction.

"It seems this hole reaches up to the Control Room."

Alice climbed up the wall with the hole on it, and jumping inside, moved on towards the Control Room.

Heat source and acoustic reaction had been added to the vision support projected on the goggles. It was a measure against the Tentacle Group, who excelled at disappearing.

Alice advanced the noticeably tilted flight of darkness, her cheeks hardened in tension.

"Oh?"

She arrived at the Control Room without any disturbance in particular, which was a bit disappointing for Alice.

All functions had stopped working, so it was pitch-black inside the room,. The precious mobile heritage was no longer usable.

Since the Twister's shape ignored aerodynamics, the moment it lost its power, it should have crashed with no hopes of being controlled. In spite of it, the fact that the aircraft hadn't fallen upside down was because someone had guided it until the last minute.

"Nh?"

A mark projected on the goggles showed traces of survivors. After seeing the reaction, Alice saw a control panel that had fallen to the ground, and used her inertial control system to send it flying. From under it, a tall woman dressed in maid clothes appeared.

"I've made you wait, Scarecrow."

Alice smiled sweetly at the woman. The head maid of the Baum family, and Dorothy's reliable assistant, Scarecrow.

If Dorothy could be neck to neck with her, and even forestall her sometimes, was thanks to her support; Alice knew that much.

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"Lady... A... lice...?"
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Scarecrow looked up at Alice in the darkness, returning a stouthearted smile as she endured her injuries.

"Are you all right?"

"Somehow... you could say so..."

Scarecrow grimaced in pain as she tried to get up. It seemed her back and leg had gotten hurt when she got trapped under the control panel.

Alice made an expression of relief in the darkness, then turned the communication switch on.

"March Hare, your turn."

<Got it, meow-!>

"Come rescue the survivors from the fallen Twister. Scarecrow's in the control room. While you're at it, collect the parts that still seem usable and bring them with you."

Alice boldly declared she was to confiscate parts of the Twister, not minding that Scarecrow was listening.

"You don't mind?"

"It can't be helped."

Scarecrow turned a blind eye to Alice's actions with a wry smile.

"Still, our source of power, the Hyperborea Crystal, that's the only thing we'd like back."

Hyperborea, one of the prehistoric ancient civilizations, whose existence had been confirmed by the Treasure Hunters. The energy obtained from the crystal body bearing its name exceeded any power plant from the modern civilization. It was a product of Lost Technology impossible to generate in the present age.

"Did you hear me? If you did, come in your Attack Device while you barely graze the sea surface. Because, you might be intercepted if you fly too high."

<Understood, pyo-n!>

March Hare's high-pitched voice made her pull away the communication device from her ear, and then Alice switched it off.

"Regarding my debt from earlier in the day, this makes us even."

Lifting Scarecrow in her arms, Alice softly whispered to her ears.

After the fierce fighting with Hikita Bungoro, the one who had taken the trouble to help Alice, naked due to the Overboost's backfire, had been none

other than Scarecrow.

"If possible, can I ask you for another favor?"

Scarecrow asked Alice with a coarse-like voice.

"We do things for each other all the time, so you don't need to make a big deal out of it."

Alice replied, not a bit embarrassed.

"So, what do you want me to do?"

"Please help our Milady. Only you can do it, Lady Alice."

"Come to think of it, where's the Mudhead? The reaction from the transmitter came from here."

"I'm terribly sorry. Since we left in a hurry to forestall you, Lady Alice, Milady changed clothes inside the plane as well. So that transmitter is picking up the uniform she took off here."

"So of all times, that gal chose now not to be wearing the transmitter? ... Wait, so you did know I gave the Mudhead a transmitter?"

"Yes. Thanks to it, in case something were to happen to us, you'd would come here to help, Lady Alice; that's what I was counting on."

"Aren't you shrewd. However, the all-important transmitter is useless now..."

As she said so, Alice's hands wandered towards her guns' grips.

"Even if you guys are silent, I know you're trying to bring me along with you!"

No sooner had Alice brought out her guns, she was already pulling the triggers.

Screams rose as the Muzzle Flash cleaved through the darkness.

Although invisible to Scarecrow, thanks to the acoustic reflection vision Alice could clearly see the figures of the Tentacle Ninjas approaching.

"As expected of their headquarters! They just won't quit!"

Cursing at them, Alice rushed out of the Control Room. If she kept fighting there, Scarecrow would get caught in it.

Alice pressed her bracelet's switch, and changed from her diving suit to her

combat uniform.

This attire will be more convenient if I need to end up using Boost.

Since the transformation released a dazzling shine for a moment, it worked to make the Tentacle Ninjas momentarily blinded as well. The Treasure Hunter seized the opening, and jumped in to cut with her daggers their mouth tentacles, the weak point of those ninjas.

Guns for long range, daggers for close combat. Taking advantage of the features of the Angra Mainyu and Aeshma, Alice mowed down the group of Tentacle Ninjas as she danced.

Shooting and reloading as she ran, she drove deadly Needle Flechettes into them without hesitation, while they continued coming out in groups.

"I'm telling you, I have no mercy for evildoers!"

Alice jumped out of the Twister's recently-made large hole, and focused her awareness on her crossed guns. Her senses now extended to just beyond the tip of her daggers, essentially making the weapons into parts of her body. She was the image of victory.

"Now, I wonder if there's anyone who can beat me!?"

She made a defiant gesture with her right arm in front of her, holding the handgun at the ready, and the left arm drawn back.

The Tentacle Ninjas that surrounded the Twister raised their guard at once. Their number, roughly a hundred or more. Though it'd be a bit hard for her to fight them off, Alice felt like she couldn't lose.

Pushed back by the girl's vigor, the Tentacle Ninjas winced.

"Fighting won't be necessary."

A swordsman she wouldn't forget showed up then behind the restless Tentacle Ninjas.

"Or, do you wish for a rematch here?"

Hikita Bungoro. Alice's body stiffened, seeing once again the tentacle swordsman she had engaged in mortal combat earlier in the day.

"You sure popped up again fast."

"Considering how fast you got here, you all wasted no time giving chase either."

Hikita's expression softened as he stroke his chin.

"Come with me. The Tentacle King beckons."

The Undulating Beasts Chamber. That was a place of punishment only for the Tentacle Group, the cult having been keeping its matters under wraps for ages.

For those in the Tentacle Group, solitary confinement was no punishment, for they had Tentacle Communication, a way of communication by using the tentacles' vibration waves. As for nutrients, they could absorb those they needed for their bodily functions from the tentacles, in exchange for their waste.

As a result, a simple imprisoning wouldn't make those in the Tentacle Group feel isolated nor hungry. So, what kind of punishment should be given to those who break the cult's precepts? Irukinuf's worshippers did their best to come up with ideas, and worked out various punishments to raise their unity.

The heaviest punishment was tentacle amputation. The tentacles were a proof of being in the Tentacle Group, hence the number of tentacles cut off was equal to the number of sins committed. When one lost all the tentacles, they would lose the blessing from the Tentacle God, and fatigue and aging would rush back. If it was a person who had lived a hundred years, such amount worth of aging appeared at once; thus, it was said to be equal to the death penalty.

As penalty for those whose crime wasn't as grave, they would be confined to this imprisonment chamber, the Undulating Beasts Chamber. "Undulating Beasts" being the nickname this cult had for the UMA known as Mongolian Death Worm. [90]

Its presence confirmed by a Russian research team, it was a huge green caterpillar-type living being that had lived in the Gobi Desert around the

Northern Mongolia at the beginning of the XIX century. Among connoisseurs, it's said that several hundred people have been killed by its poison so far, with unending eye-witnesses and victims.

The cult had captured this dangerous being, and had succeeded in taming it.

Thus, the punishment called the "Undulating Beasts Chamber" consisted in being thrown into a room crowded with Mongolian Death Worms.

And so, Lynn found herself in a space just about four square meters wide, filled with giant carnivorous worms.

Ripping off her tattered red dress, the mouth-like organisms with a meat color reminiscent of viscera were repeating the eerie peristaltic moves typical of worms, seeking entrance to the valleys and mountains of the girl's body.

If it was a normal human, they'd have been eaten in an instant, but those who received the tentacles' blessing wouldn't die from just that. All which the Mongolian Death Worm damaged, the tentacles would repair. As a result, only pain remained in their body. An everlasting pain.

That was the kind of punishment the traitors to the Tentacle Group had to endure at the Undulating Beasts Room.

As they smeared their body fluids on her, the Mongolian Death Worms latched into Lynn's limbs, and ate her soft meat.

"Nh~~~!"

Lynn, her mouth shut, groaned with sharp pain. She couldn't afford to open her mouth. If she did, the Mongolian Death Worm would enter her body. Even if she wouldn't die from that either, she didn't want her body violated from the inside.

"Uuh... ugh..."

Occasionally, Lynn's body writhed in intense shock. After all, the hunting method the Mongolian Death Worms used to get food was stunning the prey with the electric shocks they released from their tail.

As her limbs were trampled on by the huge earthworms, Lynn kept a calm mind, and waited for the time she'd be released. Were she to faint, that'd mean

surrendering her body to that worm. She wanted to avoid that at all costs.

As if answering Lynn's expectations, footsteps approached. Stepping hard on the stone pavement, someone stopped right above Lynn.

Clack...

One corner of the ceiling opened, making a heavy sound. As a ray of light spread within the jet-black room, the photophobic Mongolian Death Worms scattered right away.

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"Haa... haa... haa..."
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Released at last from the Undulating Beasts' assault, Lynn looked up at the ceiling. A man with a beard stood on the edge of the skylight.

"Oh, it seems you didn't faint."

The man looked down on Lynn with a crooked smile.

Rasputin. That had been the Apostle that had stood in her way when she had gone to offer the Salzburg Cube, along with Leonidas. Lynn glared at him, without bothering to hide the nakedness of her body, spilling out of her clothes torn by the worms.

"I'd appreciate you not looking at me with such scary eyes. This humble one did come to help you."

Saying so, Rasputin spread the clothes he held under his arm, enough for her to see them well. It was the same crimson dress Lynn liked to wear.

"Did the King forgive me, so I'm allowed ouut?"

Rasputin shook his head at Lynn's question.

"Then, whyy?"

"It's an order from an even greater being."

He merely replied that, throwing the new clothes down at Lynn.

"You were given a new mission. Change your clothes and get out, Judy."

"Eh, did you say "Judy"...!?"

Rasputin, who seemed to be rescuing her against the instructions from the

Tentacle King, had just referred to her with the codename only one person used, her secret information provider "Daddy-Long-Legs." So, she reflexively studied his visage.

"By any chance, are you Daddyy?"

Rasputin avoided giving a clear answer to Lynn's question, smiling vaguely instead.

Guided by Hikita Bungoro, Alice reached the center of the island.

"This is as far as I am allowed to go."

Hikita's pace stopped before a huge pyramid and a temple comprised of stone pillars.

The traces of the megalith civilization scattered all over the world reached their peak there.

Such a combination of monoliths at the temple's foundation, a delicate sculpture of stone pillars running all the way back to ancient Rome, to say nothing of the Egypt and Mayan pyramids. Before the best of architectural technology long lost to the current world, Alice held an interested gaze.

"You're to proceed alone from here on," Hikita stepped back, showing Alice the way. Huge stairs spread in front of Alice.

Those stairs with a deep slope and the surrounding structure reminded one of the temples of Cambodia's Ang Kor temple or Latin America's Chichen Itza. [91] But then again, this one was huger and better kept. Proof that they weren't ruins, but remained used to that very day.

"Why can't you come too?"

"Only the 12 Apostles and those summoned by the Tentacle King may go up. I was told I was only to guide you here."

"Then, what if I turn heel and escape?"

"I would only stop you with all my might."

Seeing Hikita reaching for his sword's hilt, Alice shrugged; she already had a good grasp of his power.

"Just kidding. Nothing ventured... and all that." [92]

Alice outstretched both arms as in a theatrical gesture.

"You show no signs of wanting to settle our dispute one day."

"You'll have to excuse me, but I enjoy things other than fighting."

Alice turned her gaze from Hikita to the stairs.

"And... if there's no choice but to climb, climb I shall."

Preparing herself for the worst, Alice left Hikita behind, and started climbing the stairs.

Where have they carried these stones from? There's only sea around the island. According to the Vimana's scan results, this island's a floating island drifting on the ocean.

Why does it float? Surely there's a certain super-ancient technology at work here.

An island full of mysteries. If we could but solve one, our Dodgson Foundation would make a big leap forward.

As Alice kept pondering over that, she finished climbing the stairs. She had arrived at a large room where six pairs of entasis pillars, 12 in total to her left and right, stood in a row. Her gaze only set on the throne in front of her, she ignored the men and women who stood at the base of the pillars, and rudely stepped up.

Sitting on the throne was an elderly man with his lower half covered in clothes. Alice harbored no doubt regarding his identity.

That's the man from in the photo I saw at the Foundation's basement. Swodar Nyarmain.

Her eyes were glued to that man who had been deeply involved in her mother's search for the Gate.

"Long time no see, right... Gate Opener."

The man spoke to Alice with a nostalgia-laden voice.

"Huh?"

Alice stopped her march, confused.

This should be the first time I've met Swodar. Why is he greeting me like that?

"Too bad, but it's the first time we meet."

Alice stared at him with a deliberately provocative attitude.

"Oh, that's right."

Swodar smiled broadly, brushing aside Alice's provocation like an old man humoring his granddaughter.

"We've been looking forward to this day for thousands, or rather tens of thousands, of years. We'd appreciate if you could overlook that."

The king snapped his fingers.

From behind the lined-up pillars, a woman appeared carrying a tray on a side table, and she approached Alice's side.

"What are you up to?"

Alice's hand reached for her waist, with a pose as if she could take out her gun at any time. The distance between her and Swodar were 10 meters.

I won't miss with this kind of distance.

Then, Alice threw a glance to the tray. On top of it there were a variety of doughnuts, including those with chocolate coating.

"Gulp."

Unwillingly, her throat made a distinct sound.

Come to think about it, I haven't eaten properly since lunch.

As soon as she remembered her hunger, her stomach began to growl as well.

"Weren't these your favorite food?"

Seeing through Alice's feeling of hunger, Swodar gave a friendly smile.

"It's-It's not like I hate them, but... just why do you know about it!"

"You taught Us all about it yourself."

"Huh?"

What is this? I don't get it.

"Now, I'd like you to taste them. I hope they're to your taste."

The woman left the side table in front of Alice, bowed and disappeared behind a pillar.

"See here, do you really think I'll eat what an enemy brings me in this situation?"

"In that case, how about this?"

Swodar stretched his right arm towards Alice.

"<u>|</u>"

Alice brought out her guns right then and made a big leap backwards.

A tentacle extended a distance of 10 meters from Swodar's right arm, took a chocolate doughnut from the tray, and brought it back.

"Huh?"

In front of the puzzled Alice, Swodar brought the doughnut to his mouth and took a bite.

"Delicious."

Apparently, he intends to show me it's not poisoned.

"I have no idea what you mean about me allegedly telling you this is my favorite food... but still."

Alice resigned herself, and put the guns back into their holster.

"It'd be a waste not to eat these doughnuts."

Alice promptly took a doughnut in her hand and brought it to her mouth.

"Mmh!"

Delicious. The full flavor of the doughnut's dough, to say nothing of its deep-

frying, makes the harmony of the bitter and sweet chocolate coating on top go beyond exquisite.

Despite her, she almost felt like exclaiming "Who made this doughnut!" and praising the chef, so tasty as it was...

However, why would he prepare this after making me come this far?

Unable to grasp Swodar's real intentions, Alice frowned.

"Hm. That face resembles that of the "Gate Toucher" so much."

"Who's that now?"^[93]

"By which I mean, your mother."

"What!? So you know what happened to Mom!"

"Of course I do know."

"Tell me! I mean, spit it out!"[94]

Done eating doughnuts, Alice's hands returned once again to the guns at her waist.

The regenerative ability the tentacles had wasn't something she was used to. But, she had prepared a special warhead to deal with that. Even if he was the Tentacle King, their apparent leader, the moment he took one of those head on, he wouldn't be able to live to tell the tale.

My opponent's talking to me too familiarly, but I didn't come here to make friends. The moment he turns hostile, I'll just shoot and blow him up.

An air of tension could be felt between Alice and the Tentacle King.

"I would ask a question to Your Majesty the Tentacle King, Swodar Nyarmain."

Hearing a sudden voice from a pillar to the left helped take some tension off Alice. But still, she couldn't get careless, and remained in a fighting pose, ready to take action at any time.

"Do speak."

The Tentacle King turned his gaze from Alice to the lowest seat to his right.

"Even if this child is the "Gate Opener" your Majesty was waiting for, isn't it

necessary to ascertain if she's fit to become our comrade?"

The bearded man, Rasputin, asked the Tentacle King, from his position at the base of the pillar.

"Ah--. I'm not willing to become your comrade."

Alice objected with a sigh. She had come this far to investigate her mother's whereabouts. Scarecrow had also asked of her to bring back Dorothy, who had gone ahead of her, but in any case, she had no intention of joining them.

"Hm. We'll think on how We should do that."

Disregarding Alice's protest, the Tentacle King asked Rasputin.

"Regarding that matter, I have an idea of my own."

"Hey--, listen to me properly!"

"We should undergo a Tentacle Initiation Tournament." [95]

"Tentacle Initiation Tournament?"

Alice felt something wrong with those unfamiliar words.

"That'd be splendid. In any event, We must check which one possesses the qualifications to become Irukinuf's Priestess."

"Wait a sec, don't go along with your talk while ignoring me-!"

Alice yelled, feeling as if it all had been settled between Rasputin and the Tentacle King.

Excuse me here, but you have been ignoring this side of the argument.

But the Tentacle King didn't seem to mind that, and raised the cane in his hand.

"To the Tentacle Initiation Tournament!"

"To the Tentacle Initiation Tournament!"

The Apostles responded to the Tentacle King's voice. As if reacting to it all, an earth tremor began, and the ground under Alice began to shake violently.

"Eh? An earthquake?"

The pillars and the floor slid aside, and changed the whole set into a threedimensional puzzle. Alice looked on at its spectacular new look, as she tried to keep her balance without falling.

In no time at all, the shrine had changed its shape into an amphitheatre's, thirty meters in diameter. The throne of the Tentacle King, who had been in front of Alice, and the 12 pillars that had towered left and right, had expanded and were surrounding the arena. Alice's current position was in the middle of such an arena.

As an unpleasant feeling grew more and more inside Alice's chest, the arena kept changing. Except for the part she was standing on, the center of the arena sank about 50 cm, and seawater flowed in. The megalithic structure had quickly changed from a shrine arena into a pool arena.

Alice was astonished, wondering what kind of technology they were using for this.

If we could only analyze the mechanism by which they can rearrange these monoliths freely like a puzzle, we'd acquire a technology worth an enormous wealth.

"Apostles of Mine!"

Swodar's voice echoed.

"At long last has appeared someone indispensable for our long-cherished wish, a candidate with the qualifications to become an Irukinuf Priestess!"

A dazzling light that extended from the peak of the 12 pillars began illuminating Alice.

"The Gate Opener... and, the Trap Avoider!"

Half of the light that extended from the pillars slowly shifted its focus, and illuminated the person in front of Alice, at that arena turned into a pool.

Alice gazed in front of her, squinting under the spotlight. With her arms tied and a bar between her legs, the one standing there was Dorothy indeed.

"W... what's with that foolish appearance?"

The girl called the Gate Opener involuntarily spoke in a dignified way.

"W-What a masterpiece! Camera, I need a camera!"

As Alice held her sides with laughter, she used her goggles' shutter mode to take pictures of her friend's silly look.

"I-I'm not dressing this way because I want to!"

Dorothy raised her voice in protest.

There, there, what's important is that you're alive and well.

Deep inside Alice's heart, she gave a sigh of relief.

At this rate, taking her and escaping won't be that hard.

"We will now be holding the Tentacle Initiation Tournament, the ritual to determine which of the two is suitable to be a Priestess!"

The Tentacle King declared so aloud, ignoring the conversation between Alice and Dorothy.

"W-What's that?"

"Let Us explain for the Gate Opener's sake."

The Tentacle King held his staff high up. As if it was a living thing, tentacles extended noisily from it, and a rainbow-colored pupil appeared at the sphere located at its peak.

Gazing at that look full of intent, Alice involuntarily reached out for her guns. However...

"Kuh-!"

I can't move my body!

<You can't use your armssss>

A genderless voice sounded inside Alice's mind.

What? Telepathy?

<My name is Irukinuf. I own the lives of all who exist in this worldddd.>

It sure likes its fancy introductions.

The voice sounded as if answering to Alice's thoughts.

<We'll perform a ritual to ascertain if you're suitable to receive the proof of being one of my Apostlessss.> A shining circular formation spread under Alice's feet, 90 cm in length, and a metal rod around 7 cm thick appeared.

What a technology!

Trying not to miss anything, Alice's red eyes stared at all that kept appearing.

That circular pattern, that way for substances to appear; both are consistent with what I saw in the Foundation's underground storage.

It was the very technology that had convinced her mother about the Gate.

<Now, fight using that stickkkk>

Using it? I can't move my body, though.

<You can use anything but your armssss>

With the voice sounded inside her mind, Alice turned her gaze to Dorothy opposite her.

Oh, I see. It's sandwiched between her thighs.

She understood how to use it in just an instant.

...Wait a minute. Why would I need to do something that foolish? This isn't a party gag, isn't there a more stylish method?

<If you don't compete, you'll only become a sacrificcce>

A shadow she couldn't quite recognize wriggled at the pool by her feet.

A sea snake?

"What's the matter, Gate Opener?"

The Tentacle King spoke to the perplexed Alice.

"If you become the winner, those people shall be freed."

The pool's stone wall slid out, and Lumberjack and Löwe came to light, restrained in a manner as if they were half-embedded into the wall.

Leaving aside that cowardly Lumberjack, to subdue even Löwe that way...

Alice was impressed at the combat ability they would have needed to do so.

"Allie, I beg of you, fight! For my underlings as well!"

Hearing Dorothy's sorrowful voice, Alice made a wry smile.

"Tentacle King, you must have misunderstood."

The mocking tone in her words was unmistakable.

"These two aren't my subordinates, so I have no duty to help them."

"What!"

Staring in wonder at her words, he leaned his body forward.

"How mean! Allie, I trusted you."

Dorothy's shoulders shook as tears poured from her eyes.

"But, you know. That Mudhead there in front of me, now she IS my friend."

Alice skillfully moved her legs, and sandwiched the stick floating in the air between her thighs.

"So you owe me for this, Dorothy."

Seeing her holding the stick, the Tentacle King nodded, satisfied, and sat back down on his throne.

"So, how should we fight?"

<You strike each other with the sticks, whoever drops her stick losessss>

The Tentacle King's staff stared at Alice.

By any chance, is that staff an actual living being?

<Indeed, I'm sure I did already introduce myselffff.>

Reading Alice's thoughts, Irukinuf answered.

Apparently, my thoughts are being leaked to it somehow.

<Reading the thoughts of you humans, that's simpler for me than breathingggg>

So, that means I can't pull a fast one on them.

Alice clicked her tongue, held the rod firmly with her thighs so as not to drop it, and carefully got down on the pool. She sunk up to her knees in cold water; a

chill ran down her spine.

There was plenty of water resistance as well, she had a hard time just walking. Dorothy also did like Alice and got down into the pool. Since she was walking slouching her inner thighs to prevent the stick from falling, it looked as if she was holding in her wee. Alice thought it was really funny.

<Don't forget you look the sammme.>

Shut up, you pervert.

The Gate Opener mentally abused Irukinuf, and slowly approached Dorothy, walking pigeon-toed.

After rescuing Scarecrow, the large-sized "Black Rabbit" Attack Device of March Hare's was now entering the Vimana flying around the island. Due to the rabbit homunculus' splendid control, she managed to land without the shock injuring Scarecrow in the least.

"Lady Scarecrow is to go the medical room. March Hare, remain on standby for now."

The Foundation staff on board the Vimana carried Scarecrow out of the Black Rabbit's rear seat, and put her on a stretcher.

<Mui~, March Hare wants to hurry and help Profeshor, pyon~!>

Hatter ignored March Hare's objection, even as it resounded all over the Black Rabbit's cockpit.

The instructions Alice had left still applied. The signal from the transmitter she carried hadn't stopped yet, and they hadn't detected the presence of the Tentacle Group -- though there was no doubt they had been involved with Dorothy -- plus, Alice was really close by. They couldn't afford to suffer the same fate as when the Twister had approached carelessly. They had to avoid the risk of losing the Vimana, an invaluable property of the Dodgson Foundation.

Hatter switched the aircraft to autopilot to ask Scarecrow about the situation back when the Twister was shot down, but it was at that moment when she noticed that a mail had arrived addressed to her.

The sender: the Red Queen.

"Once again...?"

Hatter muttered, opening the mail.

Apparently there were new instructions in it. After reading the contents displayed on the information screen on the cockpit's right side, Hatter nodded in silence.

After all, it did come from the Red Queen, one of the 3 Queens who were the high-rankers of the Foundation, so the order had higher priority than Alice's. The option of going against it or even harboring doubts about it didn't even exist for the homunculus.

"March Hare, replace the Attack Device's features with the Equipment B. As soon as that is over, rush there at Supersonic Speed."

<Ro-ger, I'll do my best-!>

"Kyauh!"

Every time the sticks came into contact, a mild electric shock flowed into the crotch parts of the girls holding them, and Dorothy screamt. Unlike Alice's underwear, made of a special material, Dorothy's abdomen was mostly covered by string.

No matter how mild the electric shock was, it flowed touching the most sensitive part of a girl, so she wouldn't be blamed if she decided she couldn't take it. Even so, she kept sandwiching the stick without letting go, maybe because the life of her subordinates was at stake, or maybe because she was a sore loser.

"Dorothy, are you ok?"

"I-I'm not okay at all!"

Dorothy shouted her complaint, her cheeks blushing.

"If-If don't prevent the sticks from hitting each other, I won't last here!"

Haa, haa, breathing heavily, Dorothy drew back to avoid Alice's stick. She had her knees underwater, and the footing was very bad. Additionally, if she let go for a moment, the stick would slip down from her thighs.

"Kuh!"

Alice wouldn't drop the stick either, so she bent her back, reinserted the stick between her thighs and pressed them tightly.

Talk about an awkward position, it's totally as if I want to pee.

"Hiaaaaaah!?"

Dorothy, who had taken a suitable distance and steadied her breath, suddenly screamt.

"What, is there something wrong?"

When she looked closely, she found a sea serpent-like animal had clung to Dorothy's thighs.

"Noo, it's so slimy...!"

Unlike Alice, who was covered up to her thighs with over-knee socks and waterproof boots, Dorothy was wearing nothing on her lower half except for her middle boots.

If it keeps clinging to her naked skin, she won't be able to take it.

"Eek! It spit something when I stepped on it! Noo, it's so slimyy!"

Dorothy twisted her body as she became close to tears. Every time her boots tried to stomp on that sea serpent-like creature and failed, the animal spat out a slimy gelatinous substance from its whole body to escape, and her footing worsened more and more.

"Bear with it for now, and stay still!"

Alice sidled up to Dorothy, intending to flick off the sea snake with her stick.

An electric shock will flow if the sticks touch, so while careful not to touch Dorothy's, I'll thrust towards the snake!

"Kyaunh!"

Dorothy let out a lovely scream.

"Ah, sorry."

Alice's stick had sunk into Dorothy's bottom, as the latter twisted her body in order to shake the sea snake coiled around her.

Even though she tried to back off in a hurry, since her footing had worsened she ended up having to move her body bit by bit, and a subtle vibration was sent to Dorothy's bottom.

"Anh!"

Dorothy wriggled, letting out a sensual voice.

"D-Don't make weird voices!"

"E-Even if you say that..."

Dorothy looked back, and in doing so, her stick hit Alice's with a bzz-.

"Fugyagyagyagya!"

Dorothy screamt as the electric shock ran through her crotch, and her body went into convulsions.

"D-Didn't I tell you not to move!"

Alice complained, bending backward as well due to the stimulus in her crotch. At least, a blessing in disguise was that the sea snake that had crawled up to around Dorothy's crotch was now escaping as a result of the shock.

In short, if we don't want those things clinging to us, we have to fight proactively. That goddamn pervert.

Alice cursed at the one gazing at her intently, wondering if there was a way to recover from the hopeless situation.

I'm doing this absurd fight with Dorothy as Irukinuf ordered, but I can't afford

to keep idling forever. On the other hand, even if I came up with some strategy, it wouldn't be surprising if my thoughts leaked to Irukinuf.

No, wait. Giving up here isn't like me.

"By the way, Dorothy, can you hear that weird voice?"

The instant Dorothy's face was close, Alice daringly whispered in her ear. If it was only Alice who could hear Irukinuf's voice, there might be a breakthrough.

"Funyu", what voiice"?"

Dorothy answered as she breathed out a harsh breath, her shoulders moving up and down.

It seemed Dorothy didn't hear it. In that case, I'll leave it to her.

"Dorothy, come up with a plan to get out of here."

"Eh? Even if you tell me that suddenly..."

Dorothy made a frowning face and started going "uh-huh" while thinking of something, while Alice gave a sidelong glance to Swodar on his throne and the staff he was holding, Irukinuf.

Did Irukinuf close its eyes while I wasn't looking?

She decided to try something, and put strength into her arm.

My hand is moving! Apparently, Irukinuf's telekinesis doesn't work if its eye isn't open.

Alice's eyes shone as she got hold of a clue for their counterattack.

<Profeshor, get down, pyon.>

Suddenly, she heard March Hare's voice from the radio.

Get down? Do you mean, "go down into the pool where these strange animals wriggle"? That silly rabbit doesn't seem to understand our situation here.

Alice turned around to shout that, but the nose of the March Hare's stealth black Attack Device "Black Rabbit" came into view at supersonic speed.

"<u>!</u>"

Alice's body reacted faster than her own mind. Pushing Dorothy down, they

dived into the pool crowded with creatures releasing slimy body fluids.

One beat later, an explosion roared, and with the shock from the Black Rabbit's thrust, the pool's water scattered around.

Fortunately for them, the slimy humors of the mysterious animals acted as cushions, and protected them from the heat and the shockwave.

Dorothy isn't called the "Good Luck Fairy" for nothing.

The 12 Apostles and the Tentacle King, who had been watching attentively the way the contest developed, got their visibility temporarily interrupted by fog, created when the displaced water droplets evaporated after the direct hit from the shockwave.

"You idiot rabbit! Did you intend to blow us up too!?"

<Forgive me, or rather, "fivegive" me, pyon>[96]

As she answered over the radio, the bunny girl came out of the Black Rabbit with submachine guns akimbo. Countless blunt weapons protruded from her back, like the feathery, colorful wings a stage actress would wear at the opera. It could be seen at a glance that she was beyond motivated.

<I have a message from Hatter. There's a Gate in this basement! That is all, pyo-n.>

As she fired her submachine guns indiscriminately, March Hare rushed up toward Alice and Dorothy.

Judging from how the impacts from the stray bullets gouge these stone pillars, they must be high-speed explosion cartridges, designed for deadly blows.

"I get that already, so stop firing at random!"

<It's an order from the Red Queen, pyon. It said to overwhelm the Tentacle King and the 12 Apostles to keep them pinned in one place, pyon.>



To save herself the trouble of exchanging magazines, March Hare threw away the submachine guns and grabbed the grenade launcher she was carrying on her back.

"March Hare! I'll give you a new command!"

If she continues with that destructive behavior, the underground Gate might be destroyed.

"Rescue Dorothy's underlings!"

"Ro-ger, pyon>

Dorothy's face brightened up with a smile when she heard that order of her partner's.

"Thanks, Allie!"

"While you're at it, Dorothy, come along with me!"

Alice bitterly knocked down the stick she was holding with her thighs, and grabbed her Angra Mainyu and Aeshma.

I'll make them regret not taking away my weapons.

"What are you going to do?"

As soon as Alice cut Dorothy's ropes, the blonde grabbed the stick she had been holding. Now that she wasn't joined with Lumberjack, that would do for a temporary weapon.

"I'll catch that guy, and make him spill the beans about Mom."

Alice looked up at the Tentacle King.

The king sat down on his throne, closing his eyes as if he was enjoying that confusing situation.

The Tentacle Initiation Tournament had been interrupted by the sudden intruder.

Even the direct hit from that sonic boom, that would spell doom for normal people, was but a gentle breeze for the Apostles.

Though there were only six of them there, each one of them could surpass an army. It'd have been easy for them to defeat immediately the bunny girl who had suddenly stormed the place, yet not one of the Apostles made a move.

This was because the Tentacle King had issued an order in advance forbidding them from counterattacking. They could only wait and see.

After ordering the 12 Apostles like so, the King didn't even try to leave his throne.

"What on earth is he thinking?"

The Apostle Leonidas watched attentively the actions of Alice and the Tentacle King, as he deflected the rain of bullets with his iron spear.

"We have decided on the Priestess!"

The King's voice resounded through the arena, to the extent that it overshadowed the gunshots from March Hare.

Right then, he proclaimed aloud toward Alice and Dorothy, who had begun running to capture him: "Priestess! Do accept it!"

Suddenly, he threw Irukinuf, the Tentacle God, with his right hand. The staff flew like a javelin, extended its feelers and clung to Dorothy.

"Dorothy?!"

Alice could only stare in wonder as the events unfolded.

"A... l... l... i... e..."

The tentacles clinging to Dorothy trampled over her entire body.

Just like a daydream, a scenery never seen before spread throughout Dorothy's field of view: a group of flying machines made from stone on the sky, an

underground metropolis with an artificial sun.

A jet black tower rising towards the heavens.

What... is this?

<Memories from my worldddd...>

Replying to Dorothy's question, a voice sounded in her mind.

"You monster, let go of Dorothy!!"

I can hear Alice's screams. What just happened to me?

<You are now fused with meeee.>

Who is this?

<My name is Irukinuffff...>

"Release her, I said-!!"

Alice pointed her gun in her direction.

This is bad, she intends to shoot for real.

Just as Dorothy thought, Alice pulled the trigger.

The bullet is probably a special warhead, though it won't kill me, I'll surely faint. Ah, that will hurt.

Dorothy closed her eyes.

<Do not fret. Behold, your own powerrrr.>

Huh?

Opening her eyes, following the voice's advice, only made Dorothy puzzled.

Why, I can see the bullets.

As she was expecting, they were Blitz Bullets. Those were a special warhead that stopped the opponent's movements by giving a powerful electric shock at the same time of the impact, temporarily paralyzing the neural transmissions.

I don't want that to hit me.

When the thought occurred to her, one of the tentacles that had wrapped around Dorothy's body moved. It vibrated, and knocked the bullet down.

Amazing. With this, I could fight Alice even without Lumberjack.

< I will fulfill your wissssh>

A voice sounded, and her body went numb.

"Wha..."

Her body moved with a will of its own, and drew near Alice.

"Mudhead! You're being manipulated, aren't you!"

Hearing Alice's cries, Dorothy lost consciousness and fell into a sleep.

I know it's foolish. It's just, I never expected her body would get hijacked this much and this fast.

Alice pointed her gun's muzzle at Dorothy, and checked her condition.

Dorothy's eyes remained vacant, her gaze devoid of any will.

Her body was being manipulated by the tentacles extending from Irukinuf.

How can I peel it off her?

The Blitz Bullets had been easily knocked down.

If attacks from a long distance aren't really effective, that only leaves combat at close quarters.

From her fight against Hikita, she had realized that the tentacles' reaction speed was faster than bullets. The problem was whether the same could be said about the ones around Dorothy's body.

Will she have the same reaction ability as those guys, who grow their own tentacles? Can she only move as a puppet?

For the sake of research too, she wanted to bring it under control. [97]

Alice remembered how Dorothy's underlings had been trapped by the poolside.

Since it's come to this, they will be the key to victory.

"March Hare, were you able to release Lumberjack?"

If it was Lumberjack's armor, it could withstand the tentacles' attacks. With her as a shield, she could fire a bullet at point-blank range.

< I was, pyon.>

"Alright, good job! Have her assist me at once!"

If it was for saving their beloved Milady, Dorothy's subordinates would spare no effort.

<It's no good, pyon. It seems she's too scared to move, pyon~>

Lumberjack's a natural coward.

The giant only moved with confidence while merged with Dorothy, or when given clear instructions by Scarecrow. The current situation prevented either, but still, her Milady was involved in all this; Alice couldn't believe she'd be so much useless than she expected.

"Then, what about Löwe?"

If it was a matter of raw reaction speed, she was second only to Alice. They'd be able to do simultaneous attacks.

<March Hare here doesn't want to free her, pyon>

"Is this the right time for that-?!!"

Alice retorted with all her strength. Maybe she did have it engraved in her mind that she was the prey, or that March Hare's rabbit lineage recognized the beast-woman Löwe's lion lineage as a dangerous existence.

However, Alice really had wanted to bring her here.

"So I'm doing it alone after all, is it?"

Alice cocked her gun again, replaced the bullets in the magazine, and drew a deep breath.

I won't be using Blitz Bullets anymore.

This time, she would use Frozen Bullets, deadly bullets that reduced the

molecules' motion speed, making them freeze and breaking the very molecular bonds.

If I fire that into Irukinuf, it won't be able to move, and it'll surely separate from Dorothy.

"You might get some frostbite from this, but try and endure."

Honestly feeling a bit guilty, Alice rushed towards Dorothy.

"Boost On!"

She proclaimed, her will to fight rising.

Alice's body chanced its shape into that of a battle goddess.

The gunfire sounds in the distance from March Hare's shots vanished, and her consciousness accelerated to match her movements.

Alice slipped into Dorothy's bosom in a fluid motion.

Her aim was the staff in her right arm.

She placed the muzzle against it and pulled the trigger.

The Frozen Bullets were fired.

Using the recoil from the explosive charge, she quickly sprung back from Dorothy's bosom.

"Did I do it?"

The freezing due to the Frozen Bullets spread and the tentacles around Dorothy's body stopped moving. No matter how weird a living being, it was one nonetheless; it couldn't avoid getting frozen.

"I guess this is checkmate."

Were she to hit it with a light shock now, it would shatter like glass. A smile appeared on Alice's lips, as a premonition of victory. However...

After Irukinuf received the direct hit of the bullet, it subtly vibrated its whole body, and the ice surrounding its surface began falling off.

So, the freezing didn't reach its core?

<It's checkmate for you, Gate Openerrrr.>

A voice sounded inside Alice's mind, and countless eyelids appeared on the tentacles extending from Dorothy's body.

"Dammit!"

Alice realized she had committed a fatal mistake. According to the "Creation Myth of Irukinuf/Arukinuf," Irukinuf was the herald of ice, regeneration and death.

Frozen Bullets would have no effect against someone who manipulated ice. She had forgotten about the information Hatter had painfully investigated about, and just when it counted the most.

The eyelids opened, and more than a hundred rainbow pupils gazed at Alice.

"Guh!"

This is its telekinesis power again.

It was the same technique Irukinuf had used to stop Alice's movements before at the Tentacle Initiation Tournament.

Is this the power of a god?

Alice regretted now having dismissed Irukinuf as just a parasite.

<You're a born leader. I could use someone like youuuu.>

Irukinuf's tentacles loomed towards Alice, who couldn't move a muscle.

Y-You coward!

She couldn't even speak that aloud. Alice cursed Irukinuf in her mind.

However, that wouldn't be stopping its next actions. Irukinuf's tentacles finally reached Alice's defenseless abdomen. Alice writhed at the cold touch.

"Ah..."

Alice gasped; she felt an unusual sensation from the protective solution covering her skin.

Her Boost was about to be forcibly released. It was the same feeling as when she came in contact with the Salzburg Cube, back at the Museum of the Soviet Army.

<That cube was one of the parts constituting my body. Therefore, is a matter of course that I have the power of cancelling your temporary appearancece>
Alice felt her face growing flushed with embarrassment, as that feeling similar to wanting to urinate overcame her.

T-This is no good...

Irukinuf's tentacles raised Alice's body high in the air.

W-Wait a minute!

Alice's pleas were in vain, as Irukinuf's tentacles opened her legs wide, and made her take a posture like a child relieving herself.

"Y-You morooon-!!"

Alice screamt, and the Boost state was released, sprinkling a golden solution from her crotch.



It's no use. Mom always says it's only over when you give up, but I can't find any openings.

As regretful tears blurred Alice's sight:

"Do you need help?"

The Tentacle King unexpectedly uttered those words.

This text is a machine translation (MTL).

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.



This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

Epilogue: Journey to a Different World

"Do you need help?"

Alice was of course suspicious of the Tentacle King's unexpected words.

It'd be weird for this not to be a trap. But, if the situation doesn't change, it's obvious I'll be made into a puppet like Dorothy.

Feeling as if she was digging her own grave^[98], Alice looked up at the Tentacle King and nodded.

"Yue Ying, your turn."

In response to the Tentacle King's command, the arena, partly destroyed by the Black Rabbit's incursion, began to move again. The floor broke up, and a huge slate rose from underground with a roaring sound, until it surrounded Alice and Dorothy.

<Profeshor! It's the Gate! That slate is giving off a Gate-like reaction!>

"Seriously!?"

March Hare screamed with a detector in her hand. Taking in her words, Alice observed the slate that surrounded her.

The total number of slates was 12. Also, each slate had an exquisite sculpture reminiscent of a door.

"Looks like Rodin's "The Gates of Hell"."

Alice suddenly was reminded of the work of the famous artist behind the sculpture known as "The Thinker."

"Indeed. Or, maybe they are the very gates to hell."

The Tentacle King spoke in a quiet voice.

"But, whether they lead to hell or to paradise, it depends on you, Alice."

"Me?"

She had noticed that Irukinuf, still controlling Dorothy, had stopped the movements of all its tentacles when the slate had appeared.

Thanks to that, Alice could escape from the posture it was keeping her in, with the legs wide open. After hiding away the wet hem of her micro-mini skirt, she went on to ask the king:

"Mom used this Gate too?"

The Tentacle King nodded silently.

He probably isn't lying.

Alice decided to believe her intuition.

<Now, you shall open the Gate as wellll.>

Irukinuf's voice echoed inside Alice's head.

He says to open it, but how?!

Although the slate imitated a door, she couldn't see any kind of hinge. No matter how one looked at it, it was one seamless piece. She didn't think it'd open even if hit with a hammer.

Are they asking me this to test my wit?

<Touch it. Will it strongly to opennnn.>

Irukinuf told her the answer, as if to dispel Alice's doubts.

"How sloppy."

With a sigh, the girl put her twin guns away inside their holsters, and held up her hands toward the slate at once.

A cold feeling ran through her fingertips. But, that wasn't all.

"Eh? What?"

Like a pebble dropped into the water, ripples of light spread throughout, and the lithographs started vibrating one after another.

The whole slate surrounding Alice began rumbling, and before soon, streaks of light appeared in the central piece, gradually getting larger and larger.

"What kind of technology is this?"

Although it seemed like each slate cracked into two and slid left and right, there was no change in the outside look of the slates, so maybe they were sliding towards a different space.

<Ooh, open, open upppp.>

Irukinuf began wriggling again, letting out a voice of joy as it clung to Dorothy.

<This time for sure, I shall defeat my deadly enemy Arukinuf, now that I've become a perfect bodyyyy.>

A square light overflowed from the slate, that had become but a framework now, the 12 pieces becoming a band of continuous, dazzling light.

At the same time, the air all around began to flow towards the light.

Are we being sucked in?

Alice lowered her body, grabbed for the floor with hands and legs and endured it.

The other side of that light was a different world. Alice's intuition told her: "Don't go!"

"But, on the other side, Mom..."

Despite Alice's conflict, Irukinuf slowly approached the slate, with Dorothy's body still in tow. Apparently, it did intend to dive into the gate.

The Gate Opener clicked her tongue, and loaded Aeshma with a new bullet. This was a tailor-made bullet against the tentacle users.

"Irukinuf! If you want to cross the Gate, I'll have you leave Dorothy behind!"

Alice pointed the muzzle at Irukinuf, and put strength into the Aeshma's trigger.

The light overflowing from the 12 sheets shone brighter and became a circle of

light.

Swodar watched that shine; back when the Gate Toucher Lewis disappeared inside it, the slate was only one piece.

It was Yue Ying who had prepared the 12 sheets to improve its reliability, and adjusted them to transfer towards the same destination.

"You have my gratitude, Yue Ying."

The Tentacle King spoke to the woman who appeared beside him, then rested his back on the throne and exhaled a deep breath.

He had just now accomplished the role he had placed on himself long, long ago, that he had pursued to the point of exhaustion.

With that, the expected destruction at 2012 wouldn't be happening. They had avoided the extinction of the human race.

"What will happen from now on?"

In contrast with the king exuding a sense of accomplishment, the woman asked so in an uneasy tone.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Lord Irukinuf, who gave us power, is about to go beyond the Gate. What will become of us in the future?"

"Worry not."

The Tentacle King continued in a calm voice.

"Our God will acquire new power and fulfill his return. It's a fate that will never ever change."

It was quite the powerful declaration. As if he knew what would be unfolding from then on.

In response to his words, Yue Ying bowed in agreement and pointed to the opposite side of the arena.

"So, did your plan include that child being released?"

The person Yue Ying was pointing at was Lynn, Irukinuf's Songstress, who was

dashing towards the slate of light. Her tentacles fluttered in the wind, she didn't bother to hid them as they extended from her waist.

Surprise dyed the king's eyes: that Songstress shouldn't get close to the Gate. Her making contact with the Gate wasn't part of his plans.

"Don't! Stop her!"

When they heard their king's scream, all the Apostles but Yue Ying noticed Lynn at once. But, no one could stop her.

Before the Tentacle King could clench his fist, Lynn jumped over the slate and disappeared inside the light.

"Curses..."

Why was the Tentacle King so upset? Yue Ying couldn't understand the reason, but an unspeakable uneasiness now permeated all.

"It should be Lynn who obtains this poweer!"

Along with her well-projected high-pitched cry, Lynn jumped towards the space of light divided by the slates.

Just like a pole-vaulter athlete, she used her tentacles to jump up into the sky, then rotated in the air, and turned her tiptoes towards Dorothy.

"Fugyanh!?"

Lynn's flying kick made Dorothy lose her balance, and she staggered into the band of light together with Irukinuf.

"Dorothyy!!"

Before Alice could reach them, Lynn landed beside Dorothy and tackled her to make sure she got inside.

As she was thrown into the band of light, Dorothy smiled, still manipulated by Irukinuf. As if it had been longing for that moment.

Then, Lynn also disappeared into the light.

"Wait, you!"

There's no time to hesitate.

Alice, guns in hand, jumped into the light and followed Dorothy and Lynn.

In a corner of the Tentacle God's Island, a woman could be seen, standing on the top of a pyramid, as she gazed upon the Gate's halo.

A one-armed woman wearing a crimson suit which fit her sexy body perfectly. Her identity was that of the librarian from the St. Label's Academy's Book Building, known as Teacher Faye, the advisor of the Literature Club.

"Yes, that'll be fine. Only you, the Songstress, can harness the power of Irukinuf and Arukinuf."

The one-armed teacher softly muttered, with a complacent smile.

"Just like you wished, I succeeded in making the Songstress slip into the Gate."

A voice sounded under her feet, where the face of a bearded man appeared next.

"Good gracious, we were indeed stalling for time, but wasn't that Tentacle Initiation Tournament amusing..."

The unshaven man rose from the shadows as he laughed.

"Rasputin."

The woman interrupted his talk with a well-projected voice.

"Did you succeed in splitting up the 12 Apostles?"

"Yue Ying and Rama remain neutral. I didn't bother approaching Leonidas. He's a follower of a Tentacle King to his very core."

"Is that so? And the other Apostles?"

Rasputin didn't reply.

"That just won't do, will it now, Rasputin?"

His body stiffened when he looked at the woman's icy pupils.

"I'll praise you for getting Rama to remain neutral. But just having you as my pawn isn't enough to negotiate with them."

"Your Majesty the Queen, spare me!"

The female teacher made a mocking smile.

"I won't spare you."

As she said so, her left arm, that shouldn't exist, appeared.

No, it wasn't a left arm. Instead, what appeared was a blue tentacle with dark red veins.

"T-That is..."

Rasputin's voice trembled in fear.

"Oh, this would be the first time I show you. This is precisely the source of my power, the God of Mad Flame Arukinuf."

The tip of the blue tentacle gave off bright red flames.

Arukinuf, the existence loathed by Irukinuf. Seeing this legendary being appearing, Rasputin screamed and escaped into the shadows.

"You fool."

Chasing him, the blue tentacle reached into the shadows.

"Burn, Arukinuf."

Following her murmur, a flame bubbled up from the shadows.

"I guess I'll need to procure underlings myself after all, right...?"

Pulling back the tentacles that turned Rasputin to ashes in an instant, the female teacher gazed at the throne in the distance.

"There should be no mention of my revival in your prophetic writings, Swodar."

Inside the dazzling shine, Alice and Dorothy advanced at a breakneck speed.

It was a similar feeling as if they were swaying by a waterslide that radically assaulted their senses. When it looked like one was going forward, it'd shake suddenly to the side and drop right below. As the only thing they felt was the weight of their own bodies, it was impossible to determine which direction they were going towards.

I wished I could have had time to prepare myself for this.

Since she had ended up having to jump into the Gate, she had none of her good equipment.

Not knowing where the Gate was or where it was connected to, she had no choice but to make do with the equipment in hand for now.

In fact, right now there's only one problem to settle.

"Irukinuf! Let Dorothy go!"

Alice pointed at Irukinuf the muzzle of the Aeshma, loaded with Spatial Rupture Bullets.

"This time the bullet will be no laughing matter."

<Ooh, did you make the precious Hyperborea Crystal into a bulletttt?>

"That's right. If you're hit with this, even you will return to nothing."

The Spatial Rupture Bullet was a bullet that used the Hyperborea Crystal, not only the Twister's but the Vimana's source of power as well, to attack.

Although it had been researched and developed by the Dodgson Foundation, it was too precious a bullet, so she had been hesitating to put it to practical use.

<But, your beloved friend will also get caught up in itttt.>

"What was that?"

<The only ones who can exist in this brightness are you, the "Gate Opener," and my kin. If I release her, this child will disappear and get burned by the</p>

lightttt.>

"Guh..."

Her finger loosened around the trigger.

Although there was the possibility of Irukinuf being lying, she couldn't possibly risk killing Dorothy by her own hands.

<Well thennnn?>

If it comes to this, no choice but to steel myself.

"Irukinuf, let's settle this outside the Gate!"

The moment Alice decided so, her throat was suddenly bound tight. Tentacles in pink and red stripes came and bit into her throat.

"It will be Lynn who obtains this poweer! I won't let you damage Irukinuuf!"

A well-projected voice echoed inside the light. The Irukinuf's Songstress used the tentacles growing from her waist to try and strangle Alice.

Without hesitation, Alice pointed her gun's muzzle backwards, and pulled the Aeshma's trigger.

Dorothy might be my friend, but Lynn is my enemy. I won't fret over defeating these monsters.

"Gyauh!?"

Exposed to the Spatial Rupture Bullet, the left side of Lynn's body disappeared, and Alice regained her freedom.

But, the impact shook the space itself violently.

"HiaaAaaaAah!"

The weight applied to her body accelerated, like a waterslide where the amount of water had suddenly risen.

"D-Dorothy!"

In the frightful, muddy stream of light, Alice reached out to Dorothy, who was getting further away.

"I won't forgive you... I'll never forgive youu!!"

Lynn, after losing half of her body, moved freely inside the muddy stream by using her tentacles. Apparently, one did need tentacles to move around this space.

"As for you, I'll make you fall into a different space-!"

Lynn's tentacles started pulling Alice and Dorothy apart. Although Alice tried cutting the tentacles with the Aeshma's dagger, there wasn't much she could do when she couldn't even maintain her posture, and quickly got separated from Dorothy.

"Gaah--! It's me who won't forgive youuu----!!"

Alice shouted angrily as Lynn and the others flowed in another direction.

The Gate's light had disappeared, and silence had returned to the arena. Alice, Dorothy and Irukinuf couldn't be seen anymore.

They all had crossed the Gate and gone to another world.

Where had they gone? And, what kind of actions would that cause?

The Tentacle King, Swodar Nyarmain, knew the answers to those questions. That was why he had allowed Alice to open the Gate.

"So history can't be changed?"

The Tentacle King closed his eyes as exhaustion washed over him.

"Save me... save the world, Alice..."

He muttered, as he thought about the past. That might have reminded him of what he should be doing now, because he opened his eyes again.

"Yue Ying, are you still here?"

"Yes."

"Then, destroy the slate... destroy the Gate."

Yue Ying stared in wonder at his words.

"The Gate fulfilled its role. I won't have its power abused."

For the first time in a while, the king dazzlingly stood up without relying on a cane, and then turned his gaze to the submachine-gun-wielding bunny girl who had been shooting exhaustively all around the arena.

"Now, what will you do, servant of the "Gate Opener"?"

March Hare made a confused look before the king's question.

"Your mistress is on the other side of the Gate. Will you stay here and fight, or withdraw obediently?"

"Err... Yeah, what to do...? This is troubling, pyon."

March Hare had no say in this situation. The one who did was Hatter, on board of the Vimana.

"Um... I'll try asking Hatter, pyon."

March Hare smiled with a grin, and switched on her communication equipment.

It's cold...

Alice woke up to a cold that threatened to freeze the very core of her body. The breath she exhaled turned white as well.

Where is this? As far as I remember, I was engulfed by the Gate's muddy stream of light.

What about Dorothy, Irukinuf and Lynn?

As Alice laid on the bed, she relentlessly looked all around her.

It seems like I'm alone in there.

Though the stone-made room had no sort of lighting, the ceiling and the walls gave off a dim light overall. As for the contents of the room, there was only the bed she was lying on.

It was a simple room, like a prison or some religious institution.

I don't have my equipment, and I'm not...

From the feeling of the blanket covering her body, Alice just realized she was stark-naked.

Well, I can't help getting impatient. Granted, it's hard for me to calm down as long as I don't even have underwear on, but there's something I have to do first of all.

The top priority for now was knowing if she could get her body to function properly. Alice stood up and moved various parts of her whole body for a while to make sure it all worked as it should: her fingertips, her toes, and so on.

"Did you wake up, Gate Opener?"

Suddenly, someone spoke from outside the room, and Alice tugged on the blanket to cover herself.

"Who's there?"

A young boy, who had gentle pupils to him, came into the doom carrying a basket with Alice's tools of the trade inside it.

"My name is, Swodar Nyarmain. I'm a priest who serves Irukinuf."

Hearing the youth's name made Alice perplexed. He had the same name as the Tentacle King, the same golden pupils, the same white hair.

" I've been expecting your arrival, according to the predictions left by the Gate Toucher."

The youth explained while disregarding her obvious embarrassment, and put the basket he was holding beside the bed.

"All the equipment you were wearing should be in there. As for the clothes, since they were wet and you could have frozen to death, I had them all processed here."

"Processed?"

"With a temperature-resistant treatment. You should be able to keep your body temperature in a comfortable range every time you wear them from now

on."

"Although I won't know until I wear them, I'll appreciate it for the time being. Thank you."

Making sure her body didn't slip out of the blanket, Alice reached out for the basket.

In there, there was her (neatly folded) uniform, her boots, her gun belt poaches, her Angra Mainyu and Aeshma, pants, and the rest of her personal effects.

"Where are we?"

Alice asked, still hiding her body with the blanket.

"It'll be faster if you see for yourself."

Saying so, the youth opened the blinds.

A bright light shone into the room. Alice squinted, and looked outside of the window. The familiar blue sky was nowhere to be seen there.

There was neither a blue sky nor a starry sky above her head. As if it was reflected into a mirror, the sky was covered with the same stone-made city as the ground.

"Welcome to the underground world, Hyperborea. A world in the verge of perishing."

As she heard Swodar's voice, Alice looked at that world with a confused look.

To be continued!

This text is a machine translation (MTL).

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.



This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

Extra: Collection of Design Materials of Alice and her Merry Friends

Νίθ

Formerly known as Nitroplus, a popular lead animator, illustrator and mechanic designer. Currently free. He managed the character design of the original gamebook that brought forth this novel, "Queen's Gate: Gate Opener Alice." Other important works of his have been "Deus Machina Demonbane," "Blassreiter" or "Muv-Luv."



キ゚ャ゚ラ゚デ゚ザ゚イ゚ン゚設定゚資゚料集



Alice

In the original work, her setting only had her in black battle clothes, but we additionally requested Mr. Ni θ for her to wear student clothes in her daily life, and a diver suit as equipment for her Treasure Hunter role. According to the instructions we attached along the novel, the Diver Suit would be like "orange lines marked over black clothes", but the school uniform we left entirely to him. When the staff gathered and we saw the design, we only said two words: "Nailed it!"



Dorothy

Blond hair against Alice's silver hair, dolly eyes against slant eyes, she has a design in contrast with Alice's. Still, a flat chest completes the whole package. Her Pilot Suit became a bold design typical of Mr. Niθ. Maybe it's because her initial impression numbed our senses, but the editorial staff promptly agreed with her exposed buttocks: "If it's the buttocks, it's OK!"





銀髪のアリスに対して金髪、ツリ目とタレ目など、アリスと対比するデザインになっている。ただし胸は揃ってツルペタに。パイロットスーツはNi θ 氏らしい大胆なデザインとなった。なお前面のインパクトで感覚が麻痺したのか、背面のお尻丸出しには「お尻ならOK!」という編集部の英断が成された。



Lynn

We requested for Lynn to be a tentacle-wielding songstress with idol-like frill clothes, voluptuous despite being a loli. Her tentacles are cute with the striped pattern, too. And it gives way to a lot of underwear fanservice too! Thank you very much, Mr. $Ni\theta$!



Sakura Shio

She's an illustrator. Excelling in costume design, she has an illustration column at the Wanibook magazine "Comic Gum" and manages the "Sakura Brand." She introduced the design for doll clothes there, already for sale. Besides fashion design, presently she's participating in illustrating girls' books, his most important work being the artwork for the "Golden Prince Series" [99] in the "B's LOG Pocket Edition". [100]



Hatter & March Hare

Despite the two homunculus subordinates of Alice being featured in the same world as her, since they were made by the same designer, we requested them be designed by Miss Sakura Shio and both given an unified image. Since they were inspired by the characters from "Alice in Wonderland," Sakura's good taste at likening Hatter to the spade suits while March Hare's was more like a heart suit was admirable. We did ask that Hatter's hat had a "Wild Wild West" feeling to it.



Tomouchi Hiroyuki

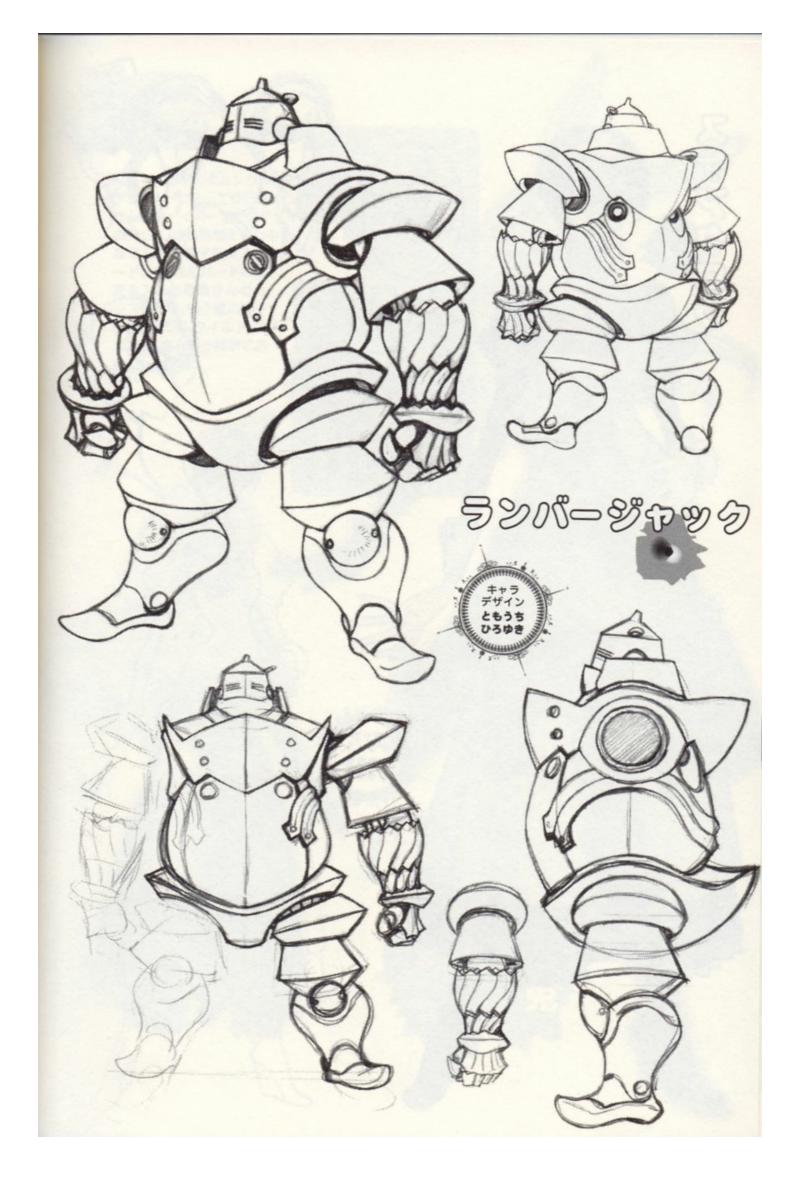
As the official illustrator of the voice actress Inoue Kikuko, we received great support from the "big sis" fans. $^{[101]}$

Though well known for his super-deformed pictures, his range of designs has been quite wide, from mechas, to animals, to creatures aimed at all ages. His most important work is the "Miss Kikuko Manga" at "AnicanR."



Scarecrow, Löwe & Lumberjack

Dorothy's 3 human subordinates, we requested Mr. Tomouchi Hiroyuki to design them. He gave us a wide variety of colorful expressions and poses as reference for drawing, which we really appreciated. Like Lumberjack, who has a powerful, charming design to her, which are Mr. Tomouchi's fortes.

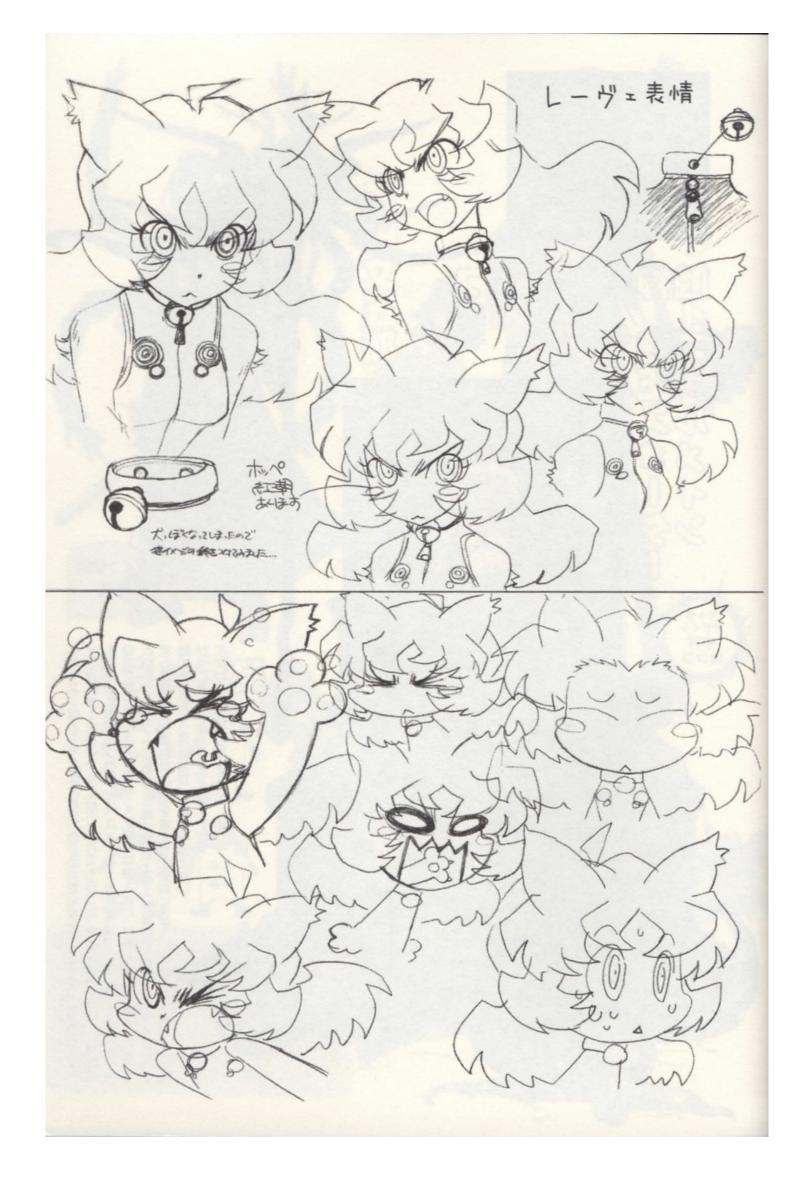






ドロシーの部下の3人は、ともうちひろゆき氏にデザインを依頼。作画参考用に多彩な表情集やポーズ集まで付けてくれる辺り、実にありがたい仕事ぶりである。ランバージャックのような、力強くも愛嬌があるデザインもともうち氏の十八番。





Irukinuf Cult

We commissioned Mr. Tomouchi to draw Irukinuf. Concerning this staff of God's tentacles, we incorporated a design of a certain Spaguetti Monster. Other than the design, it was Nakamura Kanko who took care of the art.

Swodar is actually a quite good person, but we gave his design an villainous look as if he was the enemy boss.

Concerning Faye, there could be spoilers regarding her concept.

Since Hikita Bungorou is an historical figure, we went with a safe design. However, I got obsessed over his Shinai weapon, so I purchased the real thing to use it as reference material.

We asked the Tentacle Ninjas to be ninjas with a Cthulhu look to them, but we never knew small fry could look this good!

The Trump soldiers were so cute, they surprised us.



Nakamura Kanko

This woman comes from a family of gag mangakas, her forte is the depiction of manly men. If needed, she can draw beautiful women and little girls. As she plays an active part in the Super Robo circles, she's accustomed to drawing robots as well. Her most important work is the "Benrey Limited Company." [102]



Afterword

"I intended to write just one book, but before I noticed I had written all three. I saw QB was turned into an anime, so I wouldn't be a man amongst men if I couldn't get on with this. Even though I understood that much, I couldn't stop."

Greetings, all you 50 hundred million Megami Bunko readers around the world, this is Eiji Okita.

Also, since this is a fiction story, there will be many differences between the fancy physics effects described in the narrative and the ones in reality. So please be mindful of that.

For this novelization, I tried to incorporate many elements I couldn't include in "Queen's Blade". Super-ancient civilizations, mechanics, UMA, UFO, supernatural powers, sects of false gods, etc...

I'll be pleased if you enjoyed it.

As for the next volume, Alice is due to develop a "sense of wonder" and a lot of activity regarding the Gate, with the different world Hyperborea at the stage.

Please stay tuned.

Eiji Okita.

Translator's Notes and References

- 1. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cryptid
- 2. ↑ As we know, it should be "spade" instead of "sword"... but this seems to be on purpose, as the author will later go into a bit more details about this particular suit
- 3. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quimbaya_artifacts
- 4. ↑ They mean these supposed relics: http://s8int.com/phile/page54.html (scroll down the page to point 8), unlike the golden airplane, they don't have a proper name
- 5. ↑ She pronounces "kyouju" as "kyooju", hence "Profeshor". "Pyon" is a sfx for a bunny hopping, too
- 6. ↑ "Good grief" ("yareyare") is a favorite expression of Alice's
- 7. ↑ The text says "ケープ" but it's closer to a "caped overcoat"
- 8. ↑ This should be a pun with "ラベ丈" (Rabe Length, pronounced "Rabetake" instead of "Label's Gakuen")... which I can't figure out what means :p Should work pretty nicely like this, though
- 9. ↑ "Ho-rumu-ru" here is supposed to be a (involuntary) spoonerism of "home-room"
- 10. ↑ Dorothy's line starts with the sfx "pu-", as in: "blowing up her cheeks in anger"
- 11. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Cayce
- 12. ↑ See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akashic_records
- 13. ↑ The Cube is real, and even Wikipedia mentions its supposed OOPArtness: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfsegg_Iron
- 14. ↑ The author keeps calling it "Red Army Museum", but this seems to be an error in the original. Wikipedia says it's better known as above: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Armed_Forces_Museum, and the Japanese name for it apparently isn't the one given so far, either
- 15. ↑ See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photon_belt

- 16. ↑ See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midnight_sun#White_Nights
- 17. ↑ BDU: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_Dress_Uniform. "Bomb-proof shield" doesn't seem to be a real thing, though
- 18.

 This is the American trillion above, 12 zeroes in a row
- 19. \(\gamma\) See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Therianthropy. It also translates as "beastmen".
- 20. ↑ This is the kind of "Daddy" she was mentioning earlier, the reference will be explained at a later chapter
- 21. \(\gamma\) He calls her a "female youkai", due to the Boost trick, that is.
- 22. ↑ This should refer to the bomb incident previously noted... and "decade" should be an exaggeration from Alice, or their ages really don't fit here
- 23. ↑ See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Many-worlds_interpretation
- 24. ↑ I'll be using "Gate" only when the katakana appears, to differentiate when it's just a kanji for "door/gate"
- 25. ↑ For reference, her weird sneeze sounded like "hekuchubi" (instead of "hekushi")
- 26. ↑ The text mentions a "fountain of Hypnos," but that doesn't seem to be an actual expression, probably is a typo.
- 27. 个 As far as I can tell, this "文明反復論" is not a real theory
- 28. ↑ This should be a reference to The Tale of Genji, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukifune
- 29. ↑ This is a real book of course, see the 4th edition: http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/405900829X. The 1st edition was probably released in 1995, it's hard to track
- 30. ↑ Can't find the English title, but it's this book about aliens, pyramids and that kind of things by Erich von Däniken:

 http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4047912638
- 31. ↑ Like she said, this is a series of Japanese books about the supernatural. Vol 6 here is about magic: http://kijimunan.ocnk.net/product/530
- 32. ↑ She technically doesn't say "in stores," but if they're supposed to come with sweets, there aren't many other options.
- 33. 个 Great Tentacle, aka "触大", should be a rank in their organization, I'm assuming.
- 34.

 This guy, Leonidas, uses "onushi" to refer to Lynn (aka old-timer)

- speech)
- 35. ↑ Much like Lynn always drags on her vocals somehow, Irukinuf will always repeat the last consonant 4 times
- 36. ↑ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dropa and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorchester_Pot
- 37. 个"月英" here is actually the Chinese kanji for "Yue Ying," the provided reading is her Japanese name "Getsuei".
- 38. ↑ The reading given for her husband is the japanese version, Shokatsu Ryou Koumei
- 39. ↑ I'm using "eternity" because it seems to say "like tens of thousands years, like a billion years", so I guess it's metaphorically... plus they give the correct, approximate number later
- 40. 个 This would be her tassel sword, "長穂剣" (literally: "long fringe sword"), hard to get a proper reading out of the Chinese kanjis anyhow
- 41. ↑ It can also mean it's Irukinuf's counterpart, but we already know there's a myth about the two of them together, courtesy of the Red Queen :p
- 42. ↑ This would be him twisting her words into a pervy joke (as in, referring to her breasts). I do think she's too young, but eh :p
- 43. ↑ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hakama
- 44. ↑ "Hi-pon" should be Lynn's nickname for Hikita here.
- 45. ↑ He's using the typical old-samurai-like "gozaru"
- 46. 个 Now she's mentioning "触忍", a "Tentacle Member" or something, probably meaning she's his senior in the cult
- 47. 个 She mentions a "陰行" that has no real translation, but should be a ninja-like disappearing technique
- 48. ↑ The book actually says 1851, but we'll trust the Wikipedia better
- 49. ↑ This object is written as "釧路の槍", I couldn't find any English sources mentioning it
- 50. \triangleright Both "classified" as OOPArts by the Wikipedia, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crystal_skull and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ac%C3%A1mbaro_figures . The part about the trilobite seems to be the "Meister Print" as displayed here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creation_Evidence_Museum

- 51. ↑ The thing just now was electromagnetics:

 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directivity . Also, the Stun Balls don't sound like a real weapon (for now?)
- 52. \(\backsquare{\cappa}\) I previously noted the suit she calls "sword" would actually be "spade," and it does get called properly in the next line.
- 53. ↑ It seems "Kiiih" is a favorite reaction of hers (see chapter 1)
- 54. ↑ "Aiming at the eye posture" = Seigan no Kamae, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tUSFJuAOzc
- 55. ↑ He uses "soregashi", a "me" used by samurais, somewhat similar to Rasputin's. He gets interrupted when he was finishing his "gozaru". Also, he would be this guy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hikita Bungoro
- 56. ↑ There's a chance she's talking about this book: http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4253003060/
- 57. 个 Literally "悪しゅう" ("bad smell"), I guess in a metaphorical sense if anything
- 58. ↑ See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamiizumi_Nobutsuna. "Shinai" is a bamboo sword made for practice: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinai
- 59. ↑ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinkage-ry%C5%AB
- 60. ↑ "Ko" meaning "old", as opposed to the "Shin" from "Shinkage" meaning "new". This doesn't seem a proper style, and Wikipedia says he continued some Kage-ryu...
- 61. ↑ He just ditched his "humble servant" and started calling himself "washi"... like an old man, that is
- 62.

 He's back to his "gozaru" now
- 63. ↑ He's changed to his "washi"-using speech again. Shambhala would be a fantastic land: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shambhala, and the mention of Gurkhas might be a reference to the "Battle of Guru": http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_expedition_to_Tibet, when the British were searching for that place around the Tibet
- 64. 个 I used "edge on the edge" because I think this is a minor pun, the text uses "先" ("edge" or "previous", basically) like five times in a space of 10 kanjis. Or also, a figure of speech to note she's seeing a cornucopia of edges:p
- 65. ↑ And he's back to "gozaru"

- 66. ↑ She would mean like when the staff members weren't looking at Lynn earlier, she made them ignore her
- 67. 个 Looking at the pictures, I'd say the ankle part is more complicated than the wrist, but the text does say "手首足首"
- 68. About Löwe: she will always speak in katakana and not use a single kanji, so I'm going to be using all caps with her. Plus, she uses short phrases that barely can be said to be properly formed... as in, she's not that good at talking Japanese on top of it:p
- 69. ↑ "Löwe" meaning "lion" in German
- 70. ↑ This does mean that Lumberjack is a girl. We've been calling her "him" all this time just because there was no clue regarding her gender.
- 71. ↑ Probably this is a typical "hero quote" they always say when they combine?
- 72. \(\gamma\) Lynn technically didn't, but Lumberjack's pissed off here
- 73. ↑ He reverted to his "old-man" speech
- 74.

 And he's back to gozaru-ing. He technically says "it is my win in the exchanges of life"
- 75. 个 Tentacle Communication ="触通", he sure makes up strange concepts
- 76. ↑ She just switched to "usa". Why isn't she using "pyon" like earlier? Because she's weird like that :p
- 77. ↑ This would be another OOPArt, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piri_Reis_map
- 78. ↑ Literally, "safety GET"
- 79. ↑ This is written as "pursing her lips like a cat", I understand that to mean she was literally making ":3"
- 80. \(\gamma\) "Fission" as in "splitting into parts", what supposedly happened to Irukinuf.
- 81. \(\gamma\) Written as "Shrine Maiden", aka "miko".
- 82.

 1 Uses "kisama", a very rude "you", here
- 83. \(\gamma\) Uses "-dono", a polite and old "you", here.
- 84. \(\gamma\) See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nan_Madol.
- 85. ↑ Hm, even if it's a "large hole", despite what the author implies, I'm pretty sure "explosive decompression" doesn't work that way...

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramayana.
- 87. \(\gamma\) Like the King, Rama uses the majestic plural.
- 88. ↑ Furigana says "Krita Yuga", apparently the same thing: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satya_Yuga.
- 89. \(\gamma\) See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_surface_effect.
- 90. ↑ See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongolian_death_worm.
- 91. ↑ See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chichen_Itza.
- 92. ↑ She's only saying half of the "Nothing ventured, nothing gained" idiom.
- 93. ↑ Literally: "who, that", meant casually.
- 94. ↑ The first part is supposed to sound humbler. Literally "teach me, I mean tell me".
- 95. 个 Written as "触入闘技", furigana "Nyokuda Patoorio", the first part doesn't really make much sense :p.
- 96. ↑ This is a silly pun with "gomen-nasai" and "rokumen-nasai" ("go" and "roku" meaning 5 and 6)
- 97. ↑ Uses a chess-like jargon, like "capturing that piece".
- 98.

 The original expression is "feeling as if grabbing a spider's thread"
- 99. ↑ See the books at: http://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/B009KZBF6Y
- 100. ↑ This one being a label of Kadokawa's light novels for little girls: http://bslogbunko.com/
- 101. ↑ This would be the voice actress' nickname, apparently why she voiced the eldest sister in Ranma 1/2 (Kasumi Tendo)
- 102. ↑ See also: https://www.mangaupdates.com/series.html?id=32546